# Police officer shares mental health battle to combat national suicide crisis



A Hampshire police officer has spoken candidly about the devastating impact that the pressures and traumas of frontline policing had on his mental health, in an effort to raise awareness and help others struggling in the profession. PC Arnie Wilson, who began his career with Hampshire Constabulary and later served as a response officer with Thames Valley Police, recounted how the accumulation of traumatic experiences pushed him to the brink of suicide twice. Wilson shared his story to mark World Suicide Prevention Day 2025, coinciding with reports that at least 100 police officers and staff across the UK have taken their own lives in the past three years, illustrating a growing mental health crisis within the service.

Wilson described how his compassion, initially a strength in delivering quality public service, became overwhelming as he absorbed the trauma he witnessed. He recalled that a particular incident involving a dead body triggered a profound emotional breakdown, leaving him feeling empty and unable to cope. His behaviour changed drastically—becoming withdrawn, prone to unexpected tears, and physically affected by weight loss—eventually resulting in prolonged leave from duty. He said, “I thought, ‘If I can't help other people and I can't do my job, then what actually is the point of me?’” reflecting on the unrealistic self-expectations common among officers.

Studies indicate that police officers face between 400 to 600 traumatic incidents over the course of their careers—an extraordinary contrast to the limited exposure most civilians experience—underscoring the exceptional mental health burden placed on law enforcement. Wilson’s journey through depression included two suicide attempts, both averted by his partner’s intervention. He credits his wife’s lifesaving actions and ongoing support alongside cognitive behavioural therapy in his recovery, facilitated by understanding the biochemical aspects of his condition. Since his return to Hampshire, Wilson has been promoted to acting sergeant and continues to champion mental health support for officers. He advocates the STEP (Suicide Trauma Education Prevention) campaign, initiated by Spencer Wragg, Chair of Hampshire Police Federation, now adopted nationally to address this urgent issue.

The issue of mental health in policing is not unique to the UK. Organisations like Blue Suicide in the United States work to combat stigma and barriers preventing officers from seeking help, emphasising officer wellness through advocacy and resource provision. Similarly, the Boston Police Department employs a person-centred approach through initiatives such as the Co-Response Model, Crisis Intervention Team Training, and specialised substance use support, aiming to better equip officers to manage mental health crises themselves and among the public. These models highlight a growing recognition internationally that mental health resources are essential to effective policing.

Support systems for police struggling with mental health are growing but challenges remain. In New York City, the Police Department has actively promoted available support services and encouraged officers to seek help as a sign of strength, rather than weakness, in an effort to reduce the pervasive stigma. Countries and organisations are taking steps to address the culture within police forces that often discourages vulnerability; this includes the National Consortium on Preventing Law Enforcement Suicide in the US, a collaboration of experts providing agencies with prevention strategies and support after incidents of suicide or attempts.

For officers needing immediate assistance, there are numerous resources including dedicated helplines like the Mental Health Support line from Oscar Kilo in the UK, and in the US, crisis hotlines and peer support networks such as the MIT Police Peer Support Team. Awareness initiatives, like the Indiana Law Enforcement Memorial’s 'We Care' programme, also work to break down stigma by reminding officers they are not alone, noting that more law enforcement personnel die by suicide than from gunfire or traffic accidents combined.

PC Wilson’s message is clear and hopeful: policing is tough, but officers should not have to sacrifice their mental health. “You can be tough and strong, but you can also be open and compassionate,” he said. His tattoo, inscribed with the words “This too shall pass,” symbolises the enduring hope and resilience possible with support and understanding—a poignant reminder that help is available and recovery is achievable.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2106383/mental-health-crisis-police-force)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2106383/mental-health-crisis-police-force)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2106383/mental-health-crisis-police-force), [[2]](https://www.bluesuicide.org/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2106383/mental-health-crisis-police-force), [[3]](https://police.boston.gov/mentalhealth/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[4]](https://www.nyc.gov/site/nypd/news/pr1214/nypd-raises-awareness-support-services-available-those-crisis-having-suicidal), [[5]](https://www.theiacp.org/resources/national-consortium-on-preventing-law-enforcement-suicide)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2106383/mental-health-crisis-police-force), [[6]](https://peersupport.mit.edu/resources-links/), [[7]](https://inlem.org/we-care/mental-health)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2106383/mental-health-crisis-police-force> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.bluesuicide.org/> - Blue Suicide is a non-profit organisation dedicated to addressing the mental health crisis among law enforcement officers. They aim to combat the stigma and barriers that prevent officers from seeking help, advocating for policy changes to achieve officer wellness. The organisation highlights the alarming rates of suicide within the police force and provides resources and support for those in need. Their mission includes raising awareness and offering assistance to officers facing mental health challenges, emphasising that no officer is alone in their struggles.
3. <https://police.boston.gov/mentalhealth/> - The Boston Police Department has implemented several initiatives to provide person-centred mental health responses to individuals in Boston. These programmes include the Co-Response Model, where clinicians accompany officers to mental health crises, and the Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) Training, which educates officers on recognising and de-escalating mental health issues. Additionally, the department has a Recovery Coach/Substance Use Liaison to assist with cases involving substance use. These efforts aim to connect individuals to appropriate resources and ensure stability during crises.
4. <https://www.nyc.gov/site/nypd/news/pr1214/nypd-raises-awareness-support-services-available-those-crisis-having-suicidal> - In December 2018, the New York City Police Department (NYPD), supported by the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention and the American Association of Suicidology, distributed a message to its members reminding them of the available support services for those experiencing personal crises or suicidal thoughts. The message, sent directly from Police Commissioner James P. O'Neill, emphasised that seeking help is a sign of strength and encouraged officers to check in with colleagues and take warning signs seriously. The initiative aimed to reduce the stigma surrounding mental health within the department.
5. <https://www.theiacp.org/resources/national-consortium-on-preventing-law-enforcement-suicide> - The National Consortium on Preventing Law Enforcement Suicide is a group of multidisciplinary experts committed to reducing officer suicide deaths. Convened by the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), the consortium focuses on solutions to emerging challenges and successes in addressing mental health and preventing officer suicide. With support from the U.S. Department of Justice’s Bureau of Justice Assistance, the consortium provides resources and information to help agencies with suicide prevention and support after a suicide death or attempt.
6. <https://peersupport.mit.edu/resources-links/> - The MIT Police Peer Support Team offers a comprehensive list of mental health resources and crisis hotlines for first responders. These include the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, available 24/7 at 988 or 800-273-TALK, and the Crisis Text Line, where individuals can text 'BADGE' to 741741 to connect with a law enforcement peer for support. The team also provides information on local resources, such as the NAMI Massachusetts Helpline, which offers assistance in navigating the mental health system and related services.
7. <https://inlem.org/we-care/mental-health> - The Indiana Law Enforcement Memorial's 'We Care' initiative is designed to raise awareness about the mental health challenges faced by law enforcement officers. The programme aims to inform officers that they are not alone in their struggles, highlighting that more officers die by suicide than from gunfire and traffic accidents combined. The initiative provides resources and support to officers experiencing emotional distress, emphasising the importance of seeking help and breaking the stigma associated with mental health issues within the law enforcement community.