

Establishing Chief Well-being Officers and Promoting Workforce Wellness

Healthcare workers and disaster service workers on the front lines against COVID-19 have faced increased workloads and stress. Recent surveys among healthcare workers have found that burnout has reached an alarmingly high-rate and if not adequately addressed, burnout can threaten the quality of public health and health services and endanger the future of our disaster service workforce.

In Los Angeles County, more than 50,000 disaster service workers joined forces with countless private and public partners to battle three COVID-19 surges over the course of a year. Now, many of these same disaster service workers continue to work tirelessly to vaccinate over 10 million residents. Los Angeles County public health and health service workers are an indispensable part of our recovery and resilience. Supporting the well-being of this workforce is essential to their individual, family, and community health.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, healthcare worker burnout was recognized as a threat to personal well-being, patient care, and the healthcare system as a whole. To improve well-being among health professionals and other public service employees, Los Angeles County departments have deployed many wellness programs, ad hoc committees,

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and champions. However, there are no County positions dedicated to improving team well-being or retention. Many hospitals and other organizations in the private and non-profit sectors are creating a new executive position to develop an organizational strategy and guide system-level and culture changes to improve employee wellness. Chief Well-being Officers play a critical role in maintaining workplace wellness, identifying and evaluating necessary support services, enhancing communication, coordinating wellness resources, and facilitating recovery and healing activities. According to the American Medical Association, establishing Chief Well-being Officers prioritizes the well-being of health professionals, improves patient outcomes, and increases retention of key personnel.

In response to impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the County workforce, the Los Angeles County Department of Human Resources (DHR) created the Countywide Enhanced Wellness Program (CWEPP) to expand available mental health and wellness services, and to begin addressing wellness from a broader and more holistic perspective. DHR has expanded wellness programs and services in six areas: physical, emotional, social, occupational, financial and intellectual. Additionally, DHR has created a robust support structure for Departmental Human Resource Managers to access key COVID-19 recovery information and a Countywide Wellness Committee to provide additional support and programming for existing departmental Wellness Coordinators.

With DHR's central support system in place, it is both timely and appropriate for County departments to have the ability to hire Chief Well-being Officers and other dedicated wellness team positions. A key organizational tool for departments to prioritize health and well-being is the creation of Chief Well-being Officer positions and integration of these positions into departmental leadership structures and incident command structures. As we recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, Los Angeles County must place employee well-being as a top priority.

I, THEREFORE MOVE that the Board of Supervisors direct the Chief Executive Office (CEO), in collaboration with the Department of Human Resources (DHR), the Alliance for Health Integration and other relevant departments, to provide recommendations for creating new classifications for a Chief Well-being Officer and applicable support staff within 90 days. The report back should include:

1. Review of best practice models for Chief Well-being Officer teams at hospitals, private companies, non-profit organizations and government agencies in other jurisdictions.
2. Descriptions of the roles, responsibilities, and specifications of the Chief Well-being Officer and relevant support staff.
3. Recommendations for Department Heads and Departmental Human Resource Managers to evaluate and identify the need for Chief Well-being Officer teams.

I, FURTHER MOVE that the Board of Supervisors direct the Department of Human Resources, in consultation with its Countywide Wellbeing Committee, to provide recommendations on additional resources or services needed to support the mental health and well-being of County worker, including the feasibility of expanding Employee Assistance Program services available to all employees.

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