

# Supporting First Responder Resilience: A Mental Health Initiative

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## BACKGROUND

- An increasing number of first responders are suffering from mental health complications including anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation, post-traumatic stress, and burnout.
- Studies have found that nearly half of North American first responders have reported suicidal ideation at 47%, while 19% admitted planning suicide, and 16% revealed having attempted suicide during their careers (Stanley, 2015).
- Early detection of these mental health complications can lead to earlier interventions, an increase in quality of life, and improved longevity of careers.

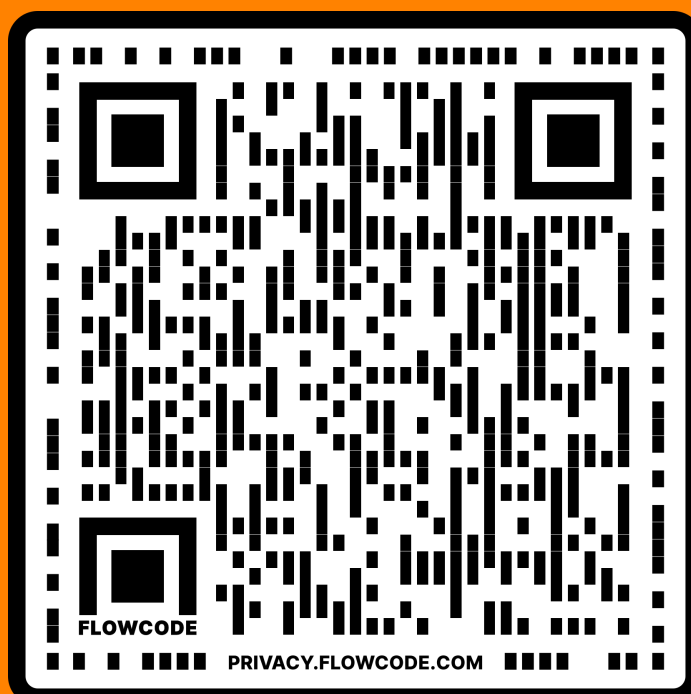
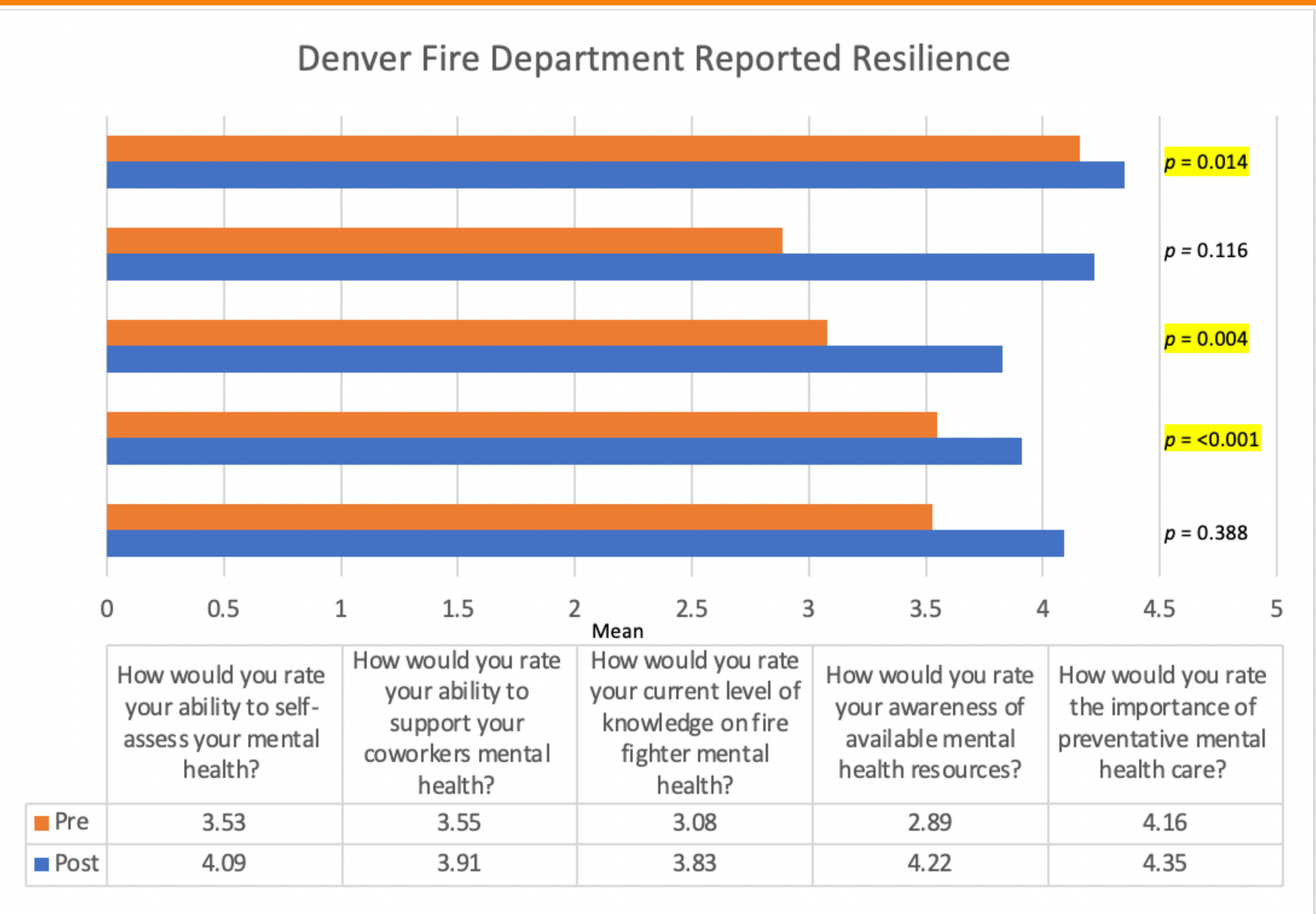
## LOCAL PROBLEM

- The site for this improvement project is the Fire Department located in Denver, Colorado.
- Prior to this project, there was no standard process for early intervention, mental health education, or self-assessment.
- The aims of this project were:
  - To educate 80% of first responders at designated Fire Houses
  - To have a 10% increase of first responders within the Denver Fire Department accessing available mental health resources.

## METHODS

- The Evidence-Based Practice Improvement model was used to guide this project.
- A literature search, review, and critical appraisal of evidence was conducted.
- Outcome measures were gathered with attendance, pre- and post-implementation questionnaires, and data was collected retrospectively on follow up appointments attended.
- Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) Cycle was used for project sustainability following implementation.

First Responders *were*  
*significantly more likely to*  
*report increased resilience*  
after the implementation of a  
mental health workshop.



## INTERVENTIONS

- The project lead and DFD Wellness Coordinator implemented an evidence based mental health educational workshop.
- The workshop included, tailored mental health education, mindfulness videos, and written materials on current resources available.
- Additionally, two assessment tools based on evidence review and population participation were introduced as self-assessments,
  - The Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS-21) and the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI).

## RESULTS

- Five fire houses were taken through the initiative with 68 total first responder participants.
- There was 100% participation from first responders.
- 3 of 5 statistically significant results from the pre and post questionnaires.
- Quarterly reports on accessed resources did not increase.
  - With 945 participants in Quarter 1 of 2024 and 938 participants in Quarter 1 of 2025.
- 14 first responders have called in to personally seeking additional resources following the initiative.
- Sustainability for this project included updating the DFD's internal website to make all materials easily accessible for all first responders.

## CONCLUSIONS

- Implementing an evidence-based, culturally competent mental health workshop successfully improved first responders reported ability to participate in preventative mental health activities.
- By making mindfulness activities, education, and self-assessment tools easily accessible to first responders, we can continue to support their unique mental health needs, as they strive to serve the Denver community.