

Office Well-Being Program

Boulder County District Attorney's Office



In 2020, the Boulder County DA's Office (DAO) joined the inaugural cohort for the Colorado Well-Being Recognition Program for Legal Employers, sponsored by the Colorado Supreme Court. The DAO is committed to supporting and promoting the well-being of all its employees in order to create a healthy work environment, adhere to the highest standards of public service, increase workplace engagement, and recruit and retain the best staff by providing opportunities for balanced and fulfilling careers. With substance use and mental health challenges prevalent across the legal profession, and due to the high-stress, trauma-exposed nature of our work, this program is a priority. The DAO recognizes that its staff are particularly at risk for experiencing direct trauma and secondary traumatic stress (STS). By providing resources to build resiliency and support mental health and emotional wellbeing, we will help minimize the impacts of trauma and stress while supporting our staff to do their best work in furtherance of public safety and justice.

Well-Being Program Highlights:

Training & Education

The DAO hosts trainings on stress and trauma at least once per year and also provides increased wellness resources for staff following critical and acute stress incidents.

Trainings cover trauma and STS, brain functions, unhealthy coping strategies and increased risk for alcohol and substance abuse, and resiliency strategies for staff and family members. Staff are also trained annually in de-escalation techniques for handling stressful situations. The DAO seeks staff feedback on trainings delivered as well as input for additional trainings that are needed so that employees have the tools to feel confident and content in their work.

Commitment to DEI

The DAO has publicly stated and stands by its commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion in both our internal office policies and our community work, such as our specialized Bias and Hate Crime Unit. The DAO is regarded as a leader among prosecutors' offices in this area and in progressive criminal justice reform. All staff receive training in equity and implicit bias. In 2019, the DAO also began a partnership with the Vera Institute of Justice to undertake additional in-depth equity training, data-review, and policy reform efforts.

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Well-Being Culture

The DAO is actively working to create a healthy workplace culture through leadership, accountability, and buy-in. In 2019, staff were given an anonymous survey that provided insight about existing organizational health and employee well-being. Since then, we have increased trainings and distribution of practical wellness tips, actively encouraged employees to access supports and resources, and worked on supervisors modeling healthy self-care practices and work-life balance. In addition, the DAO will implement 360-degree evaluations of supervisors in 2021, allowing for additional staff feedback.

Evaluations & Compensation

Employee evaluations were revamped in 2019 to include clearer metrics, additional categories that better capture individualized accomplishments and needs, and increased opportunity for narration and feedback. Evaluations are completed annually and include a written evaluation by a supervisor, an employee self-evaluation, and an in-person meeting with the elected DA. Compensation is evaluated annually for market adjustments and merit increases. The DA also provides a direct and transparent office and county financial updates.

Work-Life Integration

DAO leadership is working to encourage and model work-life balance such as taking time off to recharge and unplugging when not working. Staff know that emails are not expected to be returned over weekends and that in an emergency they will be contacted directly. In May 2021, the DAO formally adopted a permanent work from home policy allowing for flexibility for hybrid returns to work for most positions in the office. We highlight healthy, non-work activities and achievements by staff and use humor and fun as tools of resiliency. The DAO also has regular, alcohol-free team-building events within units and across the office.

Resources & Staffing

Our Director of Prevention and Restorative Justice oversees the Well-Being Program and serves as a trusted and direct point of contact for staff wellness information and assistance. The Director regularly sends practical tips and resources via email, organizes trainings, and coordinates events such as acupuncture for staff. Employees also have direct, anonymous access to counseling. The DAO is a public office with limited funding but works hard to consistently assess staff needs and ensure awareness of and access to all available resources.

Resources Available to Staff:

Specialized Clinicians

All DAO employees have direct access to contracted clinicians for therapeutic interventions, including post-critical incident interventions related to or impacting job functions. Contact information is prominently displayed and emailed frequently. Employees can access either of two agencies that specialize in law enforcement and trauma work. Services are provided anonymously; employees may contact providers directly to schedule an appointment and the DAO is billed without naming any employee.

EAP & Wellness Program

The DAO participates in the County's EAP program which offers each employee and each family member 8 sessions (per issue) of free and confidential therapy at no cost to the employee. Additionally, employees are enrolled for free in the Virgin Pulse wellness platform which includes information and resources, incentives for healthy habits, and tracking of nutrition, sleep, financial health, mindfulness, and physical fitness. Other supports are available through COLAP and our local behavioral health provider.

Facility Dogs

The DAO has two certified courthouse facility dogs, Buck and Rylan, onsite in the Boulder Office and an additional support dog, Amigo, in the Longmont Office. While the dogs and their handlers are specially trained to work with victims and witnesses, the dogs' jobs also include providing support, comfort, and humor to the office's employees. Employees are encouraged to access the dogs when needed to assist them in high stress situations, to help diffuse tension, and to provide personal support.