

# Critical Issues Listening Sessions Report

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**2023**

# Executive Summary

Throughout 2023, IACP President John Letteney and IACP Deputy Executive Director Terrence Cunningham facilitated a series of six Critical Issues Forum Listening Sessions. During these sessions, local law enforcement leaders from various regions were invited to share their thoughts on the state of policing. Over the course of this series, approximately 250 public safety employees, including sworn and non-sworn personnel, took advantage of the opportunity to contribute to these conversations, offer potential solutions to shared challenges, and provide IACP with guidance on how to focus our resources. Discussions were open-ended, but generally centered around three questions:

**What is the biggest issue facing your agency?**

**What is the biggest issue facing the policing profession?**

**What can the IACP do to help?**

At each location—California, Tennessee, Minnesota, Ontario (Canada), Massachusetts, and Arizona—there were unique answers, but it quickly became clear there are many common threads all police agencies share. Many pressing topics of discussion, including recruitment and retention, officer safety and wellness, and public perception of police, are truly interconnected issues. These matters are complex and may not be easily resolved, especially given the position of law enforcement agencies within the larger criminal justice system. However, law enforcement personnel can come together to face challenges together, gain and maintain the support of their communities, and effectively provide the services needed to keep the public safe. An important lesson coming out of this series is that while the policing profession faces a number of ever-evolving challenges, local communities are largely supportive of their public safety officials.

## Key Findings

### Recruitment and Retention

- Agencies worldwide are finding it difficult to find and connect with well-qualified potential candidates for police work. Staffing shortages cause increases in stress and resource insufficiencies, with many agencies competing with each other for personnel.

### Negative Media Portrayal

- While police work results in largely positive public safety outcomes, news coverage of substandard policing from any part of the world can quickly spread and these directives, often without opportunities to collaborate with other members of the criminal justice system, impact police sentiment in local communities.

### Lack of Support from Legislators and Prosecutors

- Many legislatures are considering, or have already adopted, measures that may significantly impact police effectiveness. In addition, broad changes in enforcement policies or operational activities are mandated without providing law enforcement agencies with sufficient time or resources to train their officers, adjust their operations or inform their communities about the impact of these new laws or regulations. enforcement must track these directives without collaborating with other members of the criminal justice system, and enforcement efforts are often not met with an equal prosecutorial response.

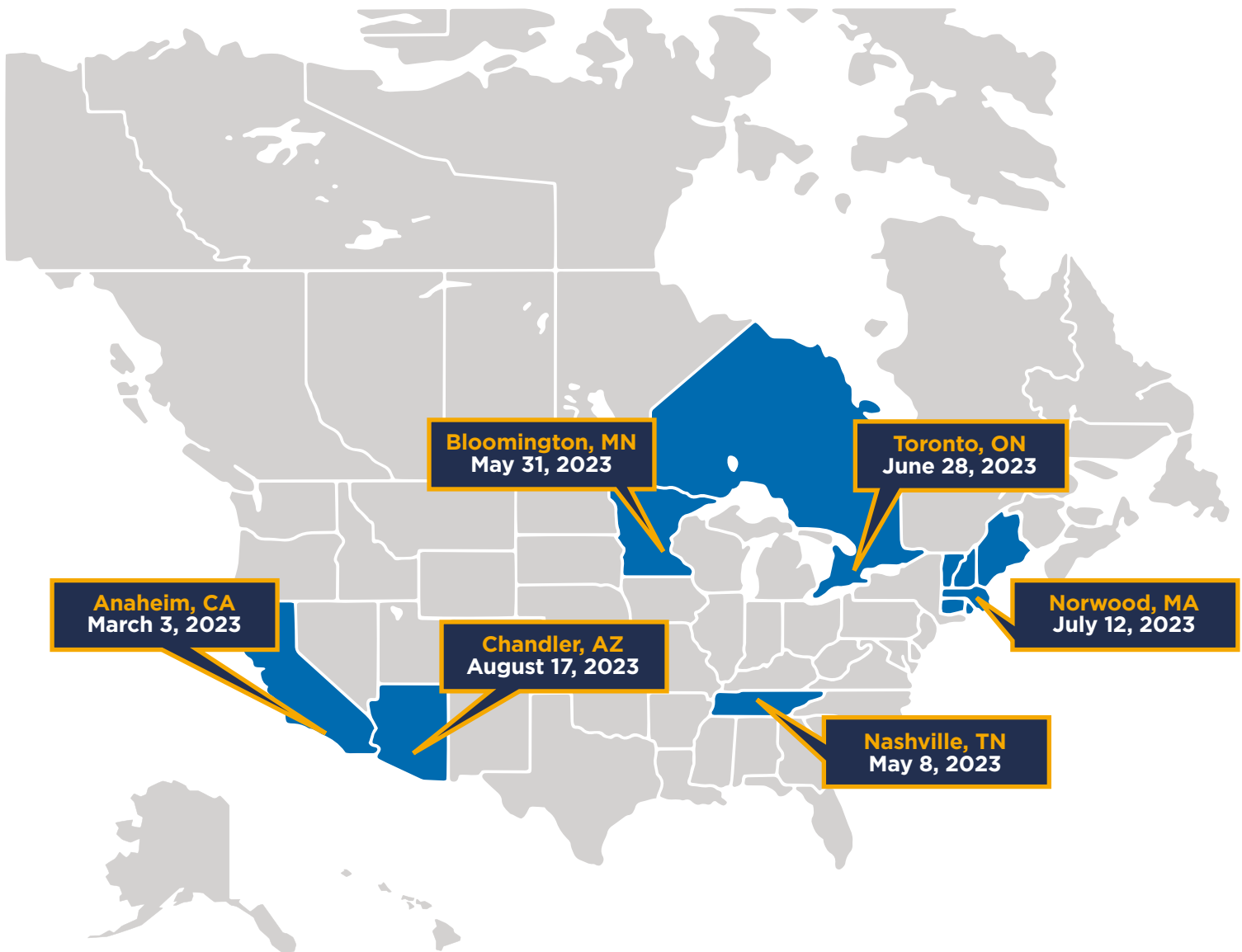
## Mission Creep

- Police are often the first call people make in times of uncertainty and must respond to a wide range of a community's needs. While law enforcement is a vital part of the criminal justice system, it is unreasonable to expect police to solve problems that would be better handled by other community professionals and services.

## Officer Wellness

- Taking care of law enforcement personnel, who dedicate their lives to helping others, is a necessary part of the policing profession. While a career in law enforcement is rewarding, it is also challenging, and burnout can lead to suboptimal outcomes for officers and those they serve.

# Tour Overview



# Session Recaps and Key Points



## California

The first listening session of the 2023 series was held during the annual IACP Officer Safety and Wellness Conference on Friday, March 3, 2023, in Anaheim, California. Attendance included approximately 40 law enforcement leaders from California. The conversation touched on a number of topics, including the following:

### Reactive Legislation

- California is often the first to legislate on hot-button issues.
- Understanding, enforcing, and keeping up with shifting legislative priorities can be challenging.
- Agencies may not have the resources to support mandates.
- Over-reaction to newsworthy events and the lack of law enforcement consultation on legislative efforts makes policing less effective.

### Demoralization of Police

- While the focus has shifted away from defunding the police, hostile attitudes are arguably more detrimental, as it indicates a deeper anti-law enforcement mindset.
- No bail/low bail and lack of support from prosecutors means that officers may become frustrated or feel that their work is meaningless.
- National, regional, or local marketing campaigns could be used to increase positive police sentiment, but most community members base their opinions on personal interactions.

### Unreasonable Expectations

- Cannot expect young recruits to be adequately trained for all potential circumstances they may be called to handle.
- Officers are not always prepared to intervene when they see a fellow officer not conforming to policy, which can be addressed by training on the duty to intervene and discussions during roll call.
- With increased public scrutiny, officers fear the potential ramifications of using force, even when justified.
- Adequately training officers on new laws and bills is difficult, especially when considering personnel shortages, and yet police are expected to understand and enforce changing legislation.

### Police Culture

- Intra-agency cliques must be monitored and disbanded to avoid harmful subcultural factions.
- Promoting a culture of wellness, even if an agency is not able to support a full-time wellness program, communicates a value on personnel which empowers them to feel and perform their best.
- Maintaining high standards for police employment is necessary to build and perpetuate a positive and effective working environment.



## Tennessee

The second listening session was hosted by the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation on May 8, 2023, in Nashville, Tennessee. Attendance included approximately 40 law enforcement leaders from Tennessee. Highlights from the conversation included the following:

### Media Portrayal

- Exposure to negative narratives by the media impact officer morale and recruitment efforts.
- Sharing stories of successful law enforcement interactions with media provides a more accurate picture of the local landscape.
- Reinforcing positive attitudes even through unofficial interactions with members of the media can help them understand the impact they have on police morale.

### Officer Wellness

- Daily law enforcement responsibilities are much more emotionally taxing than those in many other fields.
- Employee assistance programs often are not tailored for law enforcement and do not provide effective interventions.
- Officers are seeking a greater work-life balance and prefer to work at agencies with fewer service calls, which creates additional staffing challenges in urban areas.
- When possible, employing or contracting with culturally competent mental health professionals and implementing periodic mental health check-ins can assist in providing the support officers need.
- Public safety efforts are more productive, effective, and positive when officers are well taken care of.

### Increases in Criminal Activity

- Overdose epidemic is draining agency resources.
- Youth crime is on the rise, especially in larger cities.

### Policing Standards

- Changes to uniforms, beard, tattoo, and physical fitness policies to attract more candidates may be lowering professional standards.





## Minnesota

The third listening session was hosted by the Bloomington, Minnesota, Police Department on May 31, 2023, in Bloomington, Minnesota. Attendance included approximately 35 law enforcement leaders from Minnesota. Main points of conversation included the following:

### Recruitment and Retention

- Younger potential applicants no longer see law enforcement as a noble profession.
- Communicating that policing is not just a job, but a lifelong career, can increase the passion, respect, and desire for law enforcement positions.
- Smaller departments are losing officers to larger agencies with better funding.

### Legislative Mandates

- Laws and mandates are being passed that complicate the law enforcement profession and can cause negative impacts on effectiveness.
- Law enforcement leaders feel excluded from the legislative process, which prevents consultation and collaboration across the entirety of the justice system and results in disparate approaches.

### Officer Safety and Wellness

- Many times, plans for programs are developed but cannot be implemented due to inadequate funding, resources, and/or personnel.

### Public Transit Safety

- Metro officers are facing challenges surrounding individuals who are experiencing homelessness, drug use, and violence on public transit systems.
- Agencies are struggling to create partnerships with community organizations to develop effective and productive interventions.





## Ontario

The fourth listening session was hosted by the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police (CACCP) at the CACCP Police Executive Mentorship Symposium on June 28, 2023, in Toronto, Canada. Attendance included approximately 40 future law enforcement leaders from Canada. The conversation centered on the following topics:

### Recruitment

- Understanding the younger generation and understanding what motivates them will develop connections with both community members and potential recruits.
- School resource officer programs provide a number of benefits related to youth engagement.
- Setting appropriate expectations for what the job entails attracts well-qualified and enthusiastic candidates.
- Offering hiring incentives can be helpful, but the pool of qualified officers must be expanded to fully staff agencies who cannot afford to compete with larger agencies.
- When possible, creating positions with higher scheduling flexibility may attract applicants who otherwise could not meet conventional staffing requirements.
- Global events related to policing affect attitudes towards police in all jurisdictions.

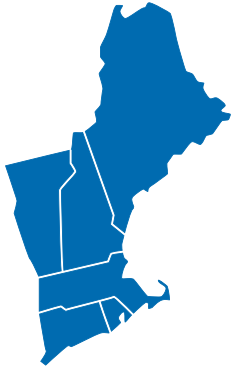
### Unreasonable Expectations

- High demand for police response could be addressed by directing some calls back to social services workers.
- Implementing co-response models can lessen strain on law enforcement and result in improved public safety outcomes.

### Leadership

- Mentorship of command staff is crucial.
- Mid-level managers set the tone for frontline officers and will be the future leaders of the agency.
- Providing new opportunities for 10-year officers who may be disillusioned by the job, but are still far from retirement, will keep them engaged and assist with retention.





## New England

The fifth listening session was hosted by the Norwood, Massachusetts, Police Department on Wednesday July 12, 2023, in Norwood, Massachusetts. Attendance included approximately 35 law enforcement leaders from across New England. Key points from the conversation include the following:

### Recruitment and Retention

- Agencies in close proximity are pulling from the same applicant pool, which makes it difficult to recruit qualified candidates.

### Data Collection

- When police collect comprehensive data, it can be used to proactively counteract false narratives and reduce and prevent misinformation.
- Data collection can assist agencies in identifying staffing needs, allocating resources, and tracking trends in the community.

### Funding

- Seeking unconventional funding sources, such as private corporations or foundations, can supplement existing finances.
- Reaching out to other agencies of similar sizes can provide inspiration for additional funding methods.
- Public safety efforts would be more effective with additional dedicated federal funding, which agencies and law enforcement organizations should continue to pursue.
- Agencies should continue to request the level of funding they truly need, not just what they believe they may be offered.

### Drugs

- The fentanyl crisis is causing additional strain, both on resources and officer stress levels.
- A national plan from the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) on how to combat the distribution and harmful effects of fentanyl could provide a unified approach and clearer path forward.







## Arizona

The final session of the series was hosted by the Chandler, Arizona, Police Department on Thursday August 17, 2023, in Chandler, Arizona. Attendance included approximately 40 law enforcement leaders from Arizona. The focus of the conversation included the following points:

### Technology

- Technological advances often outpace bureaucracy for obtaining such equipment.
- Some agencies may be able to share technological resources to increase efficiency.
- As agencies become more reliant on technology for investigative operations, there must be protective measures to provide defense against potential cyber threats.
- Through investigations, agencies may need guidance on lawful access to relevant encrypted technological information.

### Training

- The lack of national standards for training requirements can create inconsistencies.
- Rapidly growing populations necessitate preparing academies in anticipation of higher policing needs.
- Statewide police academies allow cadets to form relationships with individuals from diverse jurisdictions, increasing career-long collaboration.
- Educational requirements can be completed at community colleges before officers receive tactical training.
- Promoting leadership opportunities to existing staff can provide stability and broader understanding of expectations.



### Data Collection

- Leading indicators can be used to get in front of emerging issues and understand community expectations.
- Data-driven collaboration with justice partners is more impactful than relying on anecdotal evidence.
- Following investigations through the entire judicial process can provide insight on patterns for factors such as bond amounts, plea trends, and sentencing outcomes.

# IACP Efforts

With these discussions in mind, the IACP can continue to advocate on behalf of the profession and use its platform to share the realities of policing across the globe. Remaining well informed on the topics local law enforcement face through their daily operations allows the IACP to effectively leverage its vast resources to call attention to and address the issues that matter most. Connecting with those on the front lines and incorporating diverse perspectives into the IACP's operations is a crucial part of the mission to enhance the global police profession.

- Recruitment and retention struggles will affect generations to come, and IACP supports efforts to create holistic, long-term change that will attract more individuals to the policing profession. A life in law enforcement is not just a job, it is a career, and police are their own best recruiters. The IACP Human Resources Section will be leveraged to better engage with target audiences on job marketing strategies, to understand the motivations and expectations of potential candidates.
- Lifting up positive stories of successful policing, which far outnumber negative accounts, is of great importance to the IACP. Highlighting those who represent the nobility of the profession is a main goal of the IACP's numerous award programs, including the Trooper of the Year, 40 under 40, Police Officer of the Year, and various Leadership awards. These individuals are recognized at IACP events, but their stories will be shared more broadly to both honor their service and spread positive media exposure at a higher level.
- In consultation with our Policy Council members, every two years, the IACP sets its legislative agenda on issues of importance to the policing profession and will continue to thoughtfully and intentionally set these policy priorities as we track progress on ongoing efforts.
- There are numerous opportunities for public safety personnel of all types and levels to get involved with IACP operations. The IACP Annual Conference and Exposition and other topic-focused events provide forums for networking and information sharing, but those interested in taking on more official roles can explore openings on IACP committees, sections, and divisions based on an area of expertise or interest. The IACP will focus on better publicizing these positions to provide a greater understanding of the IACP's operations and broaden the scope of individuals who may be interested in participating in this capacity. This includes posting which committees have vacancies on the IACP webpage, to better allow individuals to take advantage of available opportunities.
- Leveraging data to support law enforcement positions first requires accurate and comprehensive data collection. While the IACP actively promotes use of national reporting measures, such as the National Use of Force database, National Decertification Index, and National Integrated Ballistic Information Network (NIBIN), the IACP recognizes that very little independent research is conducted on law enforcement matters. In pursuit of such data, the IACP will be employing its newly developed Research Center to measure key policing outcomes and the effectiveness of various interventions, ensuring that the profession has the best available information when formulating enforcement strategies.
- Training opportunities offered by the IACP cover a wide range of topics, but we continuously draw on our partners and a cadre of subject matter experts to further expand their reach. Furthermore, the IACP understands that law enforcement personnel have unique needs and time commitments, and continues working to develop additional training formats to assist with scheduling flexibility; increasing accessibility to the curricula and training concepts we produce.
- The IACP Policy Center produces Model Policies, along with Concepts & Issues Papers to provide additional context on a variety of issues. Agencies are able to use these documents as templates for their own operations, ensuring

that they have proper oversight mechanisms in place. However, due to the ever-changing nature of communities worldwide, many of these existing policies now may not adequately cover all necessary considerations. IACP staff and Policy Center Advisory Group volunteers will review and update these resources, consulting with relevant stakeholders as needed, to provide timely and practical guidance.

## Resources

- **[National Consensus Policy and Discussion Paper on Use of Force:](#)**

The National Consensus Policy on Use of Force is a collaborative effort among 11 of the most significant law enforcement leadership and labor organizations in the United States. The policy reflects the best thinking of all consensus organizations and is intended to serve as a template for law enforcement agencies to compare and enhance their existing policies on the use of less lethal and deadly force.



- **[IACP Policy Fact Sheets on Use of Force Standards and Qualified Immunity:](#)**

These fact sheets go beyond stating the IACP's policy position regarding these issues, but also provides important context, including an overview of the issue, policy implications, and key points. The fact sheets are meant to aid police leaders as they speak to elected officials, the media, and community members—with aligned messaging.



- **[Peer Bystander Intervention in](#)**

**[Law Enforcement Agencies:](#)** This resource offers information on law enforcement duty to intervene, including benefits and potential barriers to peer intervention. Guidance on effective intervention, including additional resources on related topics, can be found in this brief overview.



- **[No-Cost Duty to Intervene Training Offered by CRI-TAC:](#)**

Duty to intervene training is offered at no-



cost to law enforcement agencies by the Collaborative Reform Initiative Technical Assistance Center (CRI-TAC). Take Action: Make the R.I.G.H.T. Choice and Intervene is available to officers of all ranks and is intended to empower and encourage officers to recognize the importance and duty of intervention to safeguard the community, the agency, colleagues, and themselves from adverse situations. Law enforcement-specific barriers to effective intervention, duty to intervene legal standards, the key benefits of effective intervention, and practical scenarios and role-playing are covered within this course.

- **[Law Enforcement Recruitment](#)**

**[Toolkit:](#)** This resource provides considerations for recruitment efforts, including strategies for collaboration, methods for outreach, and strategies for selection.



- **[Standards of Conduct Model Policy:](#)**

This policy provides guidance on the standards of conduct embodied in the law enforcement officer's code of ethics and agencies' statements of values and mission, so that officers have a clear understanding of agency expectations pertaining to conduct and activities while on and off duty.



- **[What Does Wellness Look Like?](#)**

**[Academy Curriculum:](#)** Over the course of seven modules, recruits will learn strategies to use throughout their careers to support their physical, mental, and financial health. They will also learn to identify signs of health and suicide risks within themselves and their fellow officers. This interactive and engaging curriculum can be presented as a full-day academy course or can be taught in shorter, modularized sections that are customized and modified to suit specific academy needs. Delivery methods include traditional lectures, facilitated discussions, group exercises, and participant-led activities. While the curriculum was developed for entry-level recruits, the content can be tailored for in-service training with tenured officers.





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