



**INTERNATIONAL  
LIFEGUARD  
CRITICAL INCIDENT  
RESPONSE ALLIANCE**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**January 14, 2026**

## **Association of Aquatic Professionals (AOAP) and International Lifeguard Critical Incident Response Alliance (ILCIRA) Announce Strategic Alliance to Advance Lifeguard Mental Health and Critical Incident Support**

**Liberty Hill, TX** — The **Association of Aquatic Professionals (AOAP)** and the **International Lifeguard Critical Incident Response Alliance (ILCIRA)** are proud to announce a new strategic alliance focused on strengthening mental health and critical incident support for lifeguards and allied aquatic professionals while addressing an often-overlooked aspect of aquatic safety: the psychological impact of potentially traumatic events.

This alliance combines AOAP's national leadership in aquatic education, operations, and professional development with ILCIRA's specialized expertise in critical incident stress management, peer support, and responder mental health. Together, the organizations will collaborate to expand access to training, resources, and best practices that help aquatic professionals prepare for, respond to, and recover from high-impact incidents while advancing professional standards that prioritize responder wellness.

“At AOAP, safety has always meant more than just policies and procedures—it means caring for the people who serve on the front lines,” said AOAP Executive Director and CEO Juliene Hefter. “This alliance with ILCIRA allows us to elevate an often-overlooked aspect of aquatic safety: the mental and emotional well-being of lifeguards and responders following critical incidents.”

Tyler Anderson, President of ILCIRA, emphasized the need for a shift in how the industry views the aftermath of a rescue and how best to prepare our staff for these events. “For too long, the aquatic industry has focused almost exclusively on the physical skills of rescue, while neglecting the internal aftermath those rescues leave behind. By adopting response frameworks consistent with internationally recognized emergency service standards, we are ensuring that lifeguards are no longer expected to ‘just get over’ a traumatic event. Our alliance with AOAP is a pivotal step in treating aquatic professionals with the same respect and psychological safeguards as any other first responder.”

At their core, AOAP and ILCIRA are united by the belief that caring for communities begins with caring for the professionals who serve them. This strategic alliance reflects a shared commitment to elevating aquatic safety beyond policies and procedures by normalizing support, reducing stigma, and integrating resilience training into professional development pathways. By

doing so, the organizations acknowledge that lifeguards and aquatic professionals are first responders who carry the emotional weight of their work long after an incident ends and deserve resources to manage that burden.

This strategic alliance reflects a shared commitment to advancing professional standards, reducing stigma around stress and trauma, and ensuring aquatic professionals are supported throughout their careers while fostering a culture of preparedness and recovery that strengthens today's aquatics workforce while safeguarding its future.

**About the Association of Aquatic Professionals** The Association of Aquatic Professionals is a non-profit 501(c)3 Organization. Our goal is to bring together professionals from all aspects of aquatics to network, educate, advocate, enrich, and improve the aquatics industry across the United States and internationally. Additionally, AOAP provides free water safety and drowning prevention materials for organizations, parents, and caregivers.

For more information on AOAP's initiatives, please visit [www.aquaticpros.org](http://www.aquaticpros.org).

**About the International Lifeguard Critical Incident Response Alliance (ILCIRA)** The International Lifeguard Critical Incident Response Alliance (ILCIRA) is a specialized non-profit 501(c)3 organization dedicated to empowering aquatic emergency responders with the tools needed to manage the aftermath of critical incidents. Utilizing the internationally recognized protocols of the International Critical Incident Stress Foundation (ICISF), ILCIRA provides peer support, consultation, and pre-incident education. By modeling their approach after global best practices in first responder mental health, ILCIRA aims to ensure no lifeguard has to navigate the psychological impact of a traumatic event alone.

For more information about ILCIRA, please visit [www.ILCIRA.org](http://www.ILCIRA.org).

---

**AOAP Media Contact:**

Julienne Hefter, Executive Director & CEO  
[julienne@aquaticpros.org](mailto:julienne@aquaticpros.org)  
262-894-9772

**ILCIRA Media Contact:**

Tyler Anderson, President  
[tyler.anderson@ilcira.org](mailto:tyler.anderson@ilcira.org)