

**Western Australian Government Response to Community Development and Justice Standing Committee (CDJSC) Report No. 19
The Toll of Trauma on Emergency Staff and Volunteers**

Recommendation	Response
<p>Recommendation 1 The Ministers for Emergency Services, Environment and Police ensure their departments undertake a formal review by 30 June 2013 of the welfare services addressing stress and trauma provided to both their career and volunteer members.</p>	<p>Supported</p> <p>Each agency has completed reviews which have examined welfare services provided to career and volunteer members addressing stress and trauma.</p> <p>A holistic safety risk assessment on critical incident responding was completed by the Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES) at the end of 2013; its priorities are aligned with most of the CDJSC recommendations. This risk assessment and report is currently progressing through the internal approval process. DFES is also supporting the establishment of an expert working group within the Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council (AFAC), which will look towards providing standards and best practice approaches to critical incident responding in an emergency services context.</p> <p>The Department of Parks and Wildlife (DPAW) has completed a review of its employee assistance program and has subsequently changed service providers. The department has also implemented a chaplaincy program.</p> <p>In June 2013 Western Australia Police (WAPOL) began a strategic reform process. As part of this process all procedures in Health and Welfare Services (H&WS) were reviewed. It was agreed that the overarching service requirement for H&WS is to provide proactive and preventative measures/services to front line employees. Proposals, including programs to address resilience in police employees, are currently being prepared to be evaluated as part of the Service Delivery Resource Model implementation process.</p> <p>Recommendations arising from earlier reviews by DFES of its critical incident response arrangements (2009) and by WAPOL of its Health and Welfare Services (2011) are also currently being progressed where possible. A number of these are aligned with the recommendations in the CDJSC Report.</p>
<p>Recommendation 2 The Western Australian Government amend current State occupational health and safety legislation so that it includes a definition for 'health' that includes psychological health.</p>	<p>Supported in principle</p> <p>The <i>Occupational Safety and Health Act 1984</i> is clear in outlining the responsibilities of employers to provide and maintain a working environment in which employees are not exposed to hazards which may result in injury or harm to their health, not excluding psychological health. A range of resources are available from the Department of Commerce to assist employers and</p>

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	<p>employees prevent and manage risks to psychological health including workplace stress and bullying.</p> <p>The Western Australian Government continues to consider its approach to implementation of the Model Work Health and Safety legislation. The recommendation to include a definition of 'health' that includes psychological health will be addressed in that context.</p>
<p>Recommendation 3 Departmental chief executives of the Western Australia Police, Department of Environment and Conservation and the Fire and Emergency Services Authority should be made personally responsible for the psychological health (as a result of trauma) of their staff and volunteers. This obligation should be reflected in their performance agreements.</p>	<p>Supported in principle</p> <p>Departmental chief executives already have this responsibility under existing legislation. The <i>Occupational Safety and Health Act 1984</i> is clear in outlining the responsibilities of employers in relation to hazards.</p>
<p>Recommendation 4 The Ministers for Emergency Services, Environment and Police ensure that their departments develop as a high priority a computer system for tracking their staff and the number of traumatic events they have attended over a particular period.</p>	<p>Supported</p> <p>WAPOL and DFES already have computer systems that record all critical incidents. Work is currently being undertaken within both departments to enable more comprehensive tracking of individual officers' critical incident attendance.</p> <p>DFES continues to refine and update its process of tracking individual officers' exposure to critical incidents. This development incorporates consultation with key stakeholders, implementing Fire Incident Reporting System's critical incident page, changes to training and updating of internal policy and procedures.</p> <p>DPAW is currently reviewing the available options to track staff involvement in traumatic events.</p>
<p>Recommendation 5 The Ministers for Emergency Services, Environment and Police request their departments to place some of their</p>	<p>Supported</p> <p>All agencies identified within the recommendation have staff and resources that provide trauma related services in regional Western Australia such as peer support networks, chaplaincy</p>

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<p>staff and resources providing trauma related services in regional Western Australia.</p>	<p>networks and local services that provide Employee Assistance Programs and critical incident response support to regional staff and volunteers. It should be noted that government departments experience some difficulty in successfully securing experienced and well qualified clinical psychologists or other similar disciplines to their regional offices.</p> <p>DFES has doubled its Chaplaincy Service which has enabled more regional responsiveness to critical incidents. There have been improvements in placement and numbers of Assistant Chaplains in regional areas. The organisation has increased the use of Employee Assistance Program psychologists in responding to significant critical incidents that occur outside the metro area. The new Peer Support Program has embedded in its structure, a highly regionalised configuration of peer supporters, team leaders and District Office advocates. DFES has begun Mental Health First Aid Accredited training in high critical incident exposure regions.</p> <p>WAPOL's Welfare Unit, Health and Welfare Services (H&WS), has been undertaking extensive visits to regional locations in 2014. To date, a Welfare Officer and a Chaplain have visited regional areas to provide education, assistance and support to police employees in Kalgoorlie, Collie, Harvey, Beverley, York, Kambalda, Goomaling, Coolgardie, Norseman, Southern Cross, Jurien, Geraldton, Gin Gin, and Toodyay. Trips are planned for the Pilbara in the next couple of months. WAPOL also has 21 Peer Support officers in regional WA.</p> <p>WAPOL has contracted an External Assistance Program (EAP) provider, PPC Worldwide who has regional associates across the state which permits officers to receive generic counselling locally in many areas. Police specific critical incidents are attended to by staff from WAPOL's internal Psychology Unit.</p>
<p>Recommendation 6 The Minister for Health immediately establish the road trauma counselling service to be funded by the Road Trauma Trust Account.</p>	<p>Supported</p> <p>Funding from the Road Trauma Trust has been approved to establish a road trauma counselling service. The Injury Control Council of WA was contracted to establish and deliver the service, which is now operating.</p> <p>WAPOL has been working closely with Road Trauma Support WA ensuring internal communication of this new resource. Pamphlets have been distributed to all regional centres and to units that attend traffic accidents, such as Major Crash.</p>

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<p>Recommendation 7 The Ministers for Emergency Services, Environment and Police ensure their departments include in their annual reports the expenditure they have incurred on preparing their staff for critical incidents, and for managing their response to these incidents.</p>	<p>Not supported</p> <p>Many activities undertaken within Departments, not just in the field of health and welfare, contribute to preparing staff for critical incidents, and for managing their response to these incidents. These activities are integrated and normalised into standard operation procedures and could not be readily extracted and quantified, which makes the accurate capturing of these costs difficult. The Western Australian Government is of the view that establishing systems to record these costs may not necessarily be an effective indicator of the delivery of these services.</p>
<p>Recommendation 8 The Premier amend Clause 35 of the <i>Public Sector Award 1992</i> so that State Government employees who volunteer to assist the Australian Red Cross during a disaster are not required to take personal or annual leave.</p>	<p>Not supported</p> <p>Implementing Recommendation 8 will not provide the majority of public sector workers with access to this employment condition, nor will it provide access to those who volunteer for the range of other private or voluntary organisations that formally support the legislative framework for emergency management.</p> <p>Clause 35 of the Public Service Award 1992 (the Award) provides for paid leave for officers who are active volunteer members of SES or DFES Units, Volunteer Marine Rescue Services Groups, St John Ambulance and Volunteer Fire and Rescue or Bush Fire Brigades and attend at declared emergencies.</p> <p>The Award only applies (with some minor exceptions) to public service officers appointed under the <i>Public Sector Management Act 1994</i>. The vast majority of public sector employees, including government officers, teachers, nurses and ‘wages’ employees, are covered by an array of other industrial instruments. Amending the PS Award therefore would not enable the overwhelming majority of public sector employees to access paid leave to volunteer for the Australian Red Cross (ARC) during declared emergencies.</p> <p>Moreover, the legal framework established for emergency management relies on the support of a range of statutory, private and voluntary organisations in addition to the ARC. Many of these are also not named in the PS Award clause.</p> <p>Recommendation 8 does not address these inequities and inconsistencies. It would simply provide access to paid leave for a limited number of public sector employees who volunteer for one particular organisation (the ARC) in these emergency situations.</p>

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	<p>However, to address the issue of paid leave for public sector volunteers, the Department of Commerce will seek endorsement from the Minister for Commerce to develop a PSD Policy Statement and Circular pursuant to the Premier's Circular 2013/03 - Coordination and Governance of Public Sector Labour Relations. The Policy Statement and Circular would provide all public sector employees who volunteer for voluntary and private organisations named in State Westplans in response (as defined in Section 3 EM Act) to be eligible for the same level of access to paid leave as currently applies to members of the State Emergency Service, St John Ambulance, Volunteer Fire and Rescue Service, Bush Fire Brigades or Volunteer Marine Rescue Services.</p>
<p>Recommendation 9 Local Government authorities incorporate into their Local Emergency Management Plans their procedures for dealing with any trauma experienced by bushfire brigade volunteers, having regard to best practice in managing trauma.</p>	<p>Not supported</p> <p>The State Emergency Management Committee (SEMC) has considered this issue and endorsed the position that Local Emergency Management Arrangements are not the best place to document an organisation's occupational health and safety procedures. The Recovery subcommittee of the SEMC has been tasked to consider a more appropriate approach to this issue.</p>
<p>Recommendation 10 The Ministers for Emergency Services, Environment and Police provide additional funds in the 2013-14 budget so that the State's emergency response agencies can implement a Psychological First Aid approach to preparing staff to deal with critical incidents and disasters, as is used in other Australian Jurisdictions</p>	<p>Supported in part</p> <p>DFES allocated an additional \$71 000 in 2013-14 to roll out Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) training to first responders. DFES has achieved the accreditation of 7 trainers in Mental Health First Aid and continues to provide recurrent funding for further implementation of training across the state.</p> <p>DPAW is finalising its arrangements to adopt psychological first aid as the primary preparedness and response tool for managing staff dealing with traumatic events.</p> <p>WAPOL provides training to all recruits on how to manage a critical incident via academy training and mortuary based learning. This is supported by Health and Welfare Services through the Chaplains and provision of education programs by the Psychology Unit. The Police Academy has also recently implemented a new Mental Health training package in consultation with the Health and Welfare Psychology Unit. MHFA is a nationally accredited program with two trainers at the academy and one H&WS trainer. As at April 2014 23 courses have been offered and 333 people have completed the training.</p>

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	<p>Psychological First Aid (PFA) is appropriate for smaller, lower level, critical incidents but is considered insufficient for the needs of specialist disaster victim identification (DVI) team members, given the magnitude of the incidents in which they are involved and their extended and close involvement with multiple bodies. Personnel involved in DVI receive psychological preparation from the initial selection of staff and during training, additional screening and clearance prior to deployment, support in mission and then debriefing and counselling upon return.</p>
<p>Recommendation 11 The Ministers for Health, Police, and Emergency Services ensure that the Western Australia Police, the Fire and Emergency Services Authority and St John Ambulance establish a formal platform to share their knowledge and experience in delivering programs to their staff and volunteers to address issues of stress from disasters and critical incidents, as is done in other Australian jurisdictions.</p>	<p>Supported in part</p> <p>Information-sharing about issues of stress from disasters and critical incidents currently occurs on an informal basis. The relevant agencies are committed to continued communication in the future.</p> <p>DFES has informally canvassed all agencies regarding setting up a regular forum to share experiences, information and practices. The first meeting is proposed to be held in the first half of the 2014/15 financial year.</p>
<p>Recommendation 12 The Ministers for Environment, Police, Child Protection and Emergency Services fund additional chaplaincy services, particularly for staff and volunteers based in rural and regional Western Australia.</p>	<p>Supported</p> <p>All agencies identified within the recommendation have either endorsed the establishment of a chaplaincy or similar service or are funding additional chaplaincy services to enable better coverage of the State.</p> <p>WAPOL, DPAW and DFES have established their own chaplaincy networks throughout regional Western Australia to assist chaplains and agency personnel involved in critical accidents or similar situations and to provide services to regional workers in the event a full time Chaplain is unable to respond.</p> <p>DFES has doubled its Chaplaincy service and has increased the numbers and the strategic placement of Assistant Chaplains. The organisation has committed to upskilling all Chaplains by providing regular training forums.</p>

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<p>Recommendation 13</p> <p>The Attorney General and the Ministers for Health and Mental Health fund their departments to establish a peer support program by the end of 2013 for their staff undertaking stressful tasks during a disaster or critical incident.</p>	<p>Noted</p> <p>WA Health is currently reviewing its Mental Health Disaster Response sub-plan. This plan outlines a stepped response to those people (including employees) suffering mental health trauma, as a result of an emergency event. It is considered that any peer support program needs to work within existing frameworks and complement established services, and should not substitute or delay referral to professional counselling services.</p> <p>The Coronial Counselling Service established within the Office of the State Coroner is available to staff of the Coroner’s Court as well as next of kin and other parties involved in coronial inquests. The service is able to provide counselling, support and debriefing to staff involved in stressful or traumatic matters in the course of their duties. Staff are also able to access psychological assistance and counselling through the Department of the Attorney General’s Employee Assistance Program.</p>
<p>Recommendation 14</p> <p>The Minister for Emergency Services and the Minister for Police provide additional resources so that the Fire and Emergency Services Authority and the Western Australia Police can at least double their number of peer support officers, with an aim to increase the number in regional areas of the State.</p>	<p>Supported in part</p> <p>DFES allocated additional funds in 2013-14 to support and expand its Peer Support Program. The Program has been reviewed, including stakeholder consultation, literature review and adoption of best practice measures, resulting in the program being redesigned. A recruiting process for a full time coordinator has been completed and DFES will appoint as soon as government restrictions are lifted.</p> <p>WAPOL Peer Support Officers are able to provide confidential support and assist employees to seek appropriate assistance. The current structure, using volunteers undertaking the role in addition to their regular duties, has proved successful: employees have trust that PSO are not “working for the organisation” and have their best interests at heart. A paid role would require more formal negotiation around payment, duties, reporting requirements and responsibility and may attract applicants to the role for the wrong reasons.</p> <p>In 2014 the training for the Peer Support Program for WAPOL was reviewed and revamped to provide more training around confidentiality and communication skills. Feedback was that this was highly successful.</p>
<p>Recommendation 15</p>	<p>Not supported</p>

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<p>The Ministers for Health, Emergency Services, Environment and Police provide additional funds to their agencies so that a detailed exercise is held on a regular basis based on a disaster that will create the worst outcome for the State.</p>	<p>The overall objective of conducting exercises is to test preparedness, agency arrangements, control and command structures, and planned response strategies to identified gaps in current capabilities.</p> <p>A primary focus of any exercise is to ensure the safety and welfare of participants. With this focus in mind, exercises are usually extremely controlled and strictly limit risks or potential trauma. Exercises may be based on worst case scenarios, and test and expose personnel to pressures involved in emergencies, but do so in such an artificial environment that they would have limited value in this sense. In addition, exercises usually involve relatively small numbers of staff. As the number of persons involved is small, the value in exposing personnel to pressure or trauma situations is also limited.</p> <p>The SEMC's 2012 Western Australian State Emergency Preparedness Report identified several areas in emergency management exercising to improve the State's capabilities: the frequency, adequacy and appropriateness of emergency management exercises and the need for the robust evaluation of these exercises. These elements were investigated in December 2012 by the SEMC Secretariat, which has endorsed the establishment of an Exercise Management Advisory Group to guide exercise writing and management across the State.</p>
<p>Recommendation 16</p> <p>The Minister for Emergency Services request the State Emergency Management Committee to review by June 2013 the sharing of data between the State's emergency response agencies using the WebEOC software and any further enhancements that can be made to this process.</p>	<p>Supported in principle</p> <p>WAPOL, Main Roads, DFES and the Department of Health all use WebEOC while the Office of Energy uses a different system (Noggin). The SEMC is continuously monitoring and reviewing the use and effectiveness of WebEOC and other systems as the State's crisis information management system.</p> <p>In regard to the specific issue highlighted in the Report, it should be noted that the WA Department of Health is working with St John's Ambulance in the use of WebEOC to track hospital capacity.</p> <p>DFES has begun recording critical incident interventions on WebEOC for large scale incidents such as the fires in Parkerville January 2014.</p>
<p>Recommendation 17</p> <p>The Fire and Emergency Services</p>	<p>Supported</p> <p>DFES uses a range of social media mechanisms to disseminate emergency warnings. This</p>

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<p>Authority should expand their use of social media to better inform the Western Australian community.</p>	<p>includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Twitter – to automatically disseminate alerts and warnings, fire danger ratings, total fire bans and media releases that appear on the DFES website; • YouTube – for community education tools such as Call Out and home fire safety videos; and • Facebook – where the DFES web address can be shared from the DFES website to a Facebook page. <p>These tools complement the existing suite of emergency warning tools used by DFES to warn the community of emergencies (i.e. emergency information 1300 phone line, telephone warning system, emergency radio broadcasts, DFES website).</p> <p>The benefits and effectiveness of using social media are understood and accepted in terms of enhancing the delivery of emergency information, gathering intelligence during an incident and strengthening relationships with the community. DFES is currently in the process of developing a digital media communications strategy which includes establishing a social media function within DFES. Once established, resources will be applied to investigate the full range of social media tools available and the best way to utilise them to deliver emergency information.</p> <p>DFES also ensures that emergency warning systems are continuously refined and improved. For example, a critical messaging system is currently being developed which will improve the speed and accuracy of disseminating emergency warnings. Additionally, DFES recently conducted research into the way in which emergency warnings are structured and disseminated in Western Australia. The findings of this research resulted in refinements to the processes around releasing emergency warning information.</p>
<p>Recommendation 18</p> <p>The Chief Executive Officer of the Fire and Emergency Services Authority request the Australasian Fire and Emergency Services Authorities Council to include a new module in the Australasian Inter-service Incident Management System to guide the provision of welfare services for emergency service workers during a</p>	<p>Noted</p> <p>The revised Australasian Inter-service Incident Management System (AIIMS) structure provides for a new role of Safety Advisor. This role has specific responsibility for providing advice and guidance to the Incident Controller on health, safety and welfare considerations for responding crews and members of the Incident Management Team.</p>

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disaster.	
<p>Recommendation 19</p> <p>The Minister for Police immediately instigate processes to ensure that the psychological well-being of officers is at the forefront of the Western Australia Police's staff planning. These processes should include all officers being trained in psychological first aid, with subsequent regular refresher courses. Senior officers should be the first priority for psychological first aid training.</p>	<p>Not supported</p> <p>Psychological First Aid (PFA) is a sound introduction to mental health and psychological duty of care matters but the situation is far more complex for a workforce such as WAPOL's, given the large number of high risk activities in which staff are engaged. It is therefore essential that well trained and experienced mental health clinicians continue to oversee this matter. Limited training in PFA could expose the agency to risk if there is an expectation for officers to manage these significant responsibilities.</p>
<p>Recommendation 20</p> <p>The State's emergency response agencies should offer exit interviews to all of their staff and volunteers and use the information they gather to improve their trauma management procedures.</p>	<p>Supported</p> <p>All agencies have existing exit interview processes for staff. These processes may involve online exit surveys or meeting with employees to ensure their separation decisions are fully informed.</p> <p>In addition to DFES' existing staff exit interview protocols, for the last 3 years, volunteers have also been included in exit surveys. DFES has also implemented 'onboarding' surveys after six months service. Data from these interviews has been used to inform and review policy, practice and procedure.</p>
<p>Recommendation 21</p> <p>The Minister for Emergency Services ensure that the Fire and Emergency Services Authority's peer support program is rejuvenated as soon as possible with increased funding to provided added training for staff volunteering for this program.</p>	<p>Supported</p> <p>DFES allocated additional funds in 2013-14 to support and expand its Peer Support Program. The Program has been reviewed, including stakeholder consultation, literature review and adoption of best practice measures, resulting in the program being redesigned. A recruiting process for a full time coordinator has been completed and DFES will appoint as soon as government restrictions are lifted.</p>

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<p>Recommendation 22</p> <p>The Fire and Emergency Services Authority, Department of Environment and Conservation and Western Australia Police explore the usefulness of using retired staff as mentors or peer supporters, either directly employed or through a suitable non-government organisation.</p>	<p>Not Supported</p> <p>The appropriateness of the use of retired members as mentors or peer supporters, either directly employed or through a suitable non-government organisation, has been examined by WAPOL and DFES.</p> <p>There are a range of issues associated with this approach: the risk of potentially exposing or re-exposing workers to trauma; industrial relations issues including employment conditions, insurance and liability; and the need for additional support and training to monitor and maintain the ongoing physical and psychological well-being of the retired staff themselves.</p> <p>DFES has reviewed the risk associated with the possibility of using retired members as mentors or peer supporters. DFES does not support this recommendation and considers the risk potential too high and considers there are more appropriate ways to increase support to emergency service workers.</p> <p>WAPOL does not support directly employing this group as mentors or Peer Support Officers. The Medically Retired WAPOL Officers Association provides a support network to ex-police officers as part of their purpose.</p>
<p>Recommendation 23</p> <p>The Ministers for Emergency Services, Environment and Police ensure their departments include provisions for regular external audits of invoices for payment in their next round of Employee Assistance Program contract negotiations.</p>	<p>Supported in part</p> <p>Provision for audit is included DFES' contractual arrangements with its EAP provider.</p> <p>WAPOL is currently finalising the tender for EAP services. Strategies for audit are being looked at with procurement and the Department of Finance however issues around client confidentiality and provision of services to family members of employees create a level of complexity to be considered in implementing an audit process.</p> <p>DPAW has completed a review of its employee assistance program and has subsequently changed service providers. It will further examine options for external audit of invoices for payment.</p> <p>The Employee Assistance Professional Association of Australasia (Inc) (EAPAA) is the national professional association. They are currently researching an audit model in consultation with relevant organisations from Canada and America to look at their models for audit.</p>