



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

SELECT COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES 2022-2023

Mr James Milligan MLA (Chair), Mr Andrew Braddock MLA (Deputy Chair),
Dr Marisa Paterson MLA

ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

JAMES MILLIGAN MLA: To ask the Minister for Police and Emergency Services:

To ask Mick Gentleman, Minister for Emergency Services, in response to his comments during Estimates concerning programs for ES workers with PTSD

- (1) Could you provide more detail about the programs you mentioned during the hearings
 - (a) How many programs are there?
 - (b) Who has access and how can they access them?
 - (c) Will you table the results of the PhD study in the Legislative Assembly?
- (2) What protections are in place to ensure emergency services personnel feel free to seek help for mental health without fearing they are sacrificing future career prospects?
- (3) What protections are in place to ensure the families of emergency services personnel who are seeking help for PTSD are supported during the recovery phase and potential pay decreases due to redeployment?
- (4) Has the Government conducted any research on whether emergency services personnel who leave their agencies with an outstanding claim for PTSD are doing so due to a lack of meaningful work while they seek support?

Mick Gentleman MLA: The answer to the Member's question is as follows: –

(1) (a) & (b)

There are several different programs that enable all ESA volunteers and staff to better manage ever-present stressors that are experienced by emergency service personnel as they seek to protect our community. Some programs are Service specific while others are offered across the ESA.

Specifically in relation to mental health, the ESA provides Mental Health First Aid courses to all its volunteers and staff. This provides education and information on the mental health conditions and disorders that people face in their community and workplace.

Mental health training packages are also available for all ESA volunteers and staff, to ensure that we are providing ongoing education to increase the resilience of our workforce. This includes programs such as the Road to Mental Readiness through Lifeline Canberra.

The ESA delivers an advanced program for the ACT Ambulance Service, based on the Victorian Ambulance MANERS training. This provides personnel with a psychological first aid framework to support staff when they have been exposed to a potentially traumatic event.

The ESA has developed a cohort of Peer Support Officers that are trained and available across the ESA. Peer Support Officers are volunteers or staff in their respective service who are available to

their peers for support. Assistance can be requested by the individual or through a notification process by their manager or Service. All Services in the ESA, including Communications Centre Officers have access to peer support.

The ESA has three volunteer Chaplains who provide denominational and non-denominational support across the whole of the ESA. The Chaplains provide an important and valued support service to the frontline workers and are available both during and immediately after significant events or incidents. The Chaplains also provide facilitated alternate therapy sessions for workers and their families.

In addition to preventative initiatives and training programs, the ESA has a Memorandum of Understanding with the Australian Defence Force who offer the ESA up to four places on the Arts for Recovery, Resilience, Teamwork and Skills Program each year. The four-week program assists personnel to address wellbeing issues, individual recovery, and improve confidence and resilience through the medium of arts.

The ESA has developed partnerships with not-for-profit organisations such as Beyondblue, Soldier On, Tharwa Valley Forge, and Frontline Yoga. These organisations provide opportunities for collaboration and wellbeing service provision such as yoga, counselling, and social activities where workers can engage. The ESA also works closely with Fortem Australia. Fortem is an evidence-based community support organisation that offers Australia's national security officials and first responders (working as employees or volunteers), and their families, with comprehensive and integrated wellbeing support.

These initiatives are all in addition to the programs available across the Justice and Community Safety Directorate and the ACT Government. All ACT Government employees and their families have access to free professional confidential counselling and related services to assist in resolving work related or personal issues via the Employee Assistance Program.

(1) (c)

The PhD study mentioned during the Estimates Hearings is not held by the ESA. It was commissioned by the ADF for their ARRTS Program.

(2)

The ESA acknowledges that the nature of work conducted by its personnel means that they are exposed to difficult situations and potentially traumatic events. The ESA is committed to providing a mentally healthy work environment for its volunteers and staff through preventative, proactive and post-incident initiatives, as outlined in response to question (1). In this regard, ESA personnel are encouraged to use the programs available to them as required, and any assistance provided is on a confidential basis.

Whenever a staff member discloses such matters to the workplace, the supports provided are based on the individual circumstances and are guided by the medical advice.

(3)

The services outlined above also encompass the family unit to ensure support is provided to the families of emergency service personnel. There is no mechanism to provide financial assistance to the family members, however, staff with accepted workers compensation claims are provided financial support both in relation to normal weekly earnings and treatment costs for the duration of

their claim. Compensation of normal weekly earnings payments are available to the age of 67 and medical expenses are paid for life.

The framework for redeployment for employees is outlined in the *Public Sector Management Act 1994* and *Public Sector Management Standards 2016*, and the relevant Enterprise Agreements. Redeployment is facilitated where suitable roles with equivalent salaries are identified.

(4)

There has not been specific research on whether emergency services personnel who leave their agencies with an outstanding claim for PTSD are doing so due to a lack of meaningful work while they seek support. The numbers of staff requiring redeployment is low and is on a case-by-case basis. All reasonable efforts are made to provide meaningful duties whilst any redeployment considerations are undertaken.

Approved for circulation to the Select Committee on Estimates 2022-2023

Signature:



Date:

13/8/2022

By the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Mick Gentleman MLA