

Answering the Call

Mental Health and Wellbeing in the
Police and Emergency Services Sector

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THE UNIVERSITY OF
**WESTERN
AUSTRALIA**

beyondblue Police and
Emergency Services Program

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Objectives

- Reduce the stigma associated with mental health conditions, attempted suicide and suicide
- Increase the number of personnel taking action to manage their mental health
- Increase the capability of agencies to create and maintain mentally healthy workplaces
- Increase public awareness of the unique and challenging role fulfilled by police and emergency services personnel



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beyondblue National Mental Health and Wellbeing Study of Police and Emergency Services

Phase 1

What?

Personal stories of police and emergency services personnel and their family members

Why?

To provide an opportunity for individuals to tell their story and to inform Phases 2 & 3

Phase 2

What?

National survey of police and emergency services personnel in Australia

Why?

To build a comprehensive picture of mental health conditions, stigma & help-seeking behaviours, risk & protective factors

Phase 3

What?

Agency-by-agency engagement, consultation with other key stakeholders

Why?

To translate the findings from Phases 1 & 2 into practical strategies to achieve change



Answering the call

National Mental Health and Wellbeing Study of Police and Emergency Services

Supported by a funding contribution from the Bushfire and Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre

Advisory Group

- Chaired by Key Lay AO APM, Chairman of Ambulance Victoria and former Commissioner of Victoria Police
- Membership includes:
 - Executive leaders from agencies & executive level union leaders
 - Academics & clinicians with specialist expertise
 - Representatives of individual personnel and family members
 - Representatives of community support groups
- Technical advisory group oversaw questionnaire development



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Aim and Key research questions

The aim of the national survey was to establish a comprehensive understanding of the mental health and wellbeing of both current and former police and emergency services personnel. The survey addressed the following research questions:

- What is the prevalence of mental wellbeing, common mental health conditions, suicidality and associated substance use among Police and Emergency Services personnel?
- What sub-groups are at higher or lower risk?
- What are the individual and organisational risk and protective factors?
- What factors influence help-seeking?



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What we know about mental health in Police and Emergency Services

- ANAO report – Managing Mental Health in the Australian Federal Police
- University of Adelaide – SA Metropolitan Fire Service Health and Wellbeing Study
- When Helping Hurts: PTSD in first responders
- Senate inquiry – the high rate of mental health conditions experienced by first responders, emergency service workers and volunteers
- Rescuers at risk (2012): worldwide pooled prevalence of PTSD: 10%



Survey methodology

- Scope: current employees, volunteers and former employees from all Ambulance, Fire and Rescue, Police and SES agencies across Australia
- Stratified random sampling from employee/volunteer lists – aiming to survey 14,000 current employees, 6,000 volunteers and 1,200 former employees
- Online administration of survey with hardcopy forms available on request
- Questionnaire length ~ 20-25 minutes



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Questionnaire content

- Wellbeing (SWEMWBS), Psychological distress (K10), PTSD, diagnosed conditions
- Impact on functioning
- Suicidal thoughts and behaviours
- Individual and organisational risk and protective factors
- Attitudinal and behavioural factors
- Resilience
- Social support
- Physical health
- Alcohol and drug use



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Questionnaire content

- Impact of experiencing stressful events in the workplace
- Working hours, shift work, impact on family
- Workplace and team culture
- Bullying
- Experience of stigma and discrimination
- Use of support services and programs
- Experiences with workers' compensation
- Barriers to seeking support
- Workplace programs and practices



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Response rates and representativeness

- 33 of 36 agencies participated
- Over 21,000 individuals participated in the survey
 - Employees: 14,868 participating (22% response rate)
 - Volunteers: 5,485 participating (10% response rate)
 - Former employees: 661 participating



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Responses achieved

Sector	Employees	Volunteers	Former employees
Ambulance	3,473	559	346
Fire & rescue	2,975	2,626	162
Police	8,088		141
SES	332	2,300	12
Total	14,868	5,485	661



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Representativeness of the sample

- Survey responses were compared with:
 - Census data by occupation and industry
 - Data from report on Government Services
 - Workforce demographic characteristics provided by agencies
- Survey data comparable with census figures by:
 - Marital status, educational attainment, country of birth, Indigenous status
- Slightly higher proportions of females, non-operational staff and older employees in the employee sample
- More active volunteers



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Representativeness of the sample

Proportion of female respondents

Sector	Survey	Census
Police	38.8	34.6
Fire & rescue	26.6	20.2
Ambulance	47.9	43.6
SES	54.2	50.9

Emerging research themes

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- Poor workplace practices and culture can be as damaging to mental health and wellbeing as occupational trauma.
- The need to educate people and support them to get help when they need it.
- The dangers of organisational and personal stigma.



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Organisational practices and culture

- Workplaces that are supportive and inclusive, have regular discussions about workplace experiences and more effectively manage emotional demands on staff have lower rates of mental health issues.



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Mental health literacy

- Some people experiencing high levels of distress did not recognise that they have a mental health issue or did not seek help.
- Recognising the signs and symptoms of emerging mental health issues, knowing when to seek support, and how to do so, are important to getting the support you need.



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Stigma

- Most personnel have a positive regard for, and are supportive of colleagues experiencing mental health conditions
- However, self-stigma – fear of what others may think or an inability to talk openly about personal feelings and circumstances – remains common



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Next steps

- Survey findings to be released end of November 2018
- Each participating agency to be provided with an agency-specific report
- Phase 3 knowledge translation strategy – 2019
- Confidentialised Unit Record File



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Thank you



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