

Media Release

The Hon Lisa Neville MP

Minister for Water

Minister for Police and Emergency Services



**DELIVERING
FOR ALL VICTORIANS**

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IMPROVING MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT FOR EMERGENCY WORKERS

The Andrews Labor Government is delivering on its key election commitment to support emergency workers through early intervention by providing them access to urgent mental health treatment as soon as they identify a problem.

A national survey undertaken by Beyond Blue ‘Answering the call’ found that one in three emergency services workers have high or very high psychological distress. This is compared to one in eight of all adults in Australia.

The \$2.5 million pilot, funded in the *Victorian Budget 2019/20*, will cover reasonable medical expenses for current and former emergency workers and volunteers who are awaiting the outcome of compensation claims for work-related mental health injuries.

The 12 month pilot will commence in two stages, beginning with Victoria Police and Ambulance Victoria staff and volunteers on 17 June.

The second stage will commence on 1 July with CFA and SES staff and volunteers, forest firefighters, public sector nurses and midwives, and MFB, ESTA, child protection, corrections and youth justice staff.

Following the trial the Government will introduce legislation to expand provisional payments to cover Victorian workers.

Currently, workers have to wait for their WorkCover claim to be assessed before they can access financial support to cover the cost of medical expenses.

The time it takes to process a claim and have it assessed can discourage injured workers from seeking prompt medical treatment. Incurring out of pocket costs while a claim is being determined can also add to a worker’s stress and negatively impact their wellbeing.

GP visits, medication and visits to psychologists and psychiatrists are amongst the costs to be covered.

Once a claim is approved medical treatment and services will be covered through the relevant compensation scheme, such as WorkCover. If a claim is rejected, the applicant will continue to have their expenses covered by the pilot program for up to 13 continuous weeks from the date the claim is submitted.

The pilot is a critical component of the Government’s package of emergency worker mental health reforms, including a Victoria Police Early Intervention and Prevention Fund, and establishment of a specialist network of clinicians and a Centre for Excellence for emergency worker mental health.

In conjunction with the commencement of the pilot, Victoria Police has also launched a new website www.bluespacewellbeing.com.au for current and former employees, and their family and friends to access information about mental health and wellbeing issues, and services that may be of further assistance.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Police and Emergency Services Lisa Neville

“We owe it to our brave Victoria Police officers to ensure that they have a mental health claim system that better responds to their needs and that encourages recovery and return to work outcomes.”

“Access to provisional payments through early intervention will encourage people to put their hand up for help when they’re struggling, knowing that they’ll get the support they need, when they need it.”

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Quotes attributable to Minister for Workplace Safety Jill Hennessy

“Our emergency workers put themselves on the line and are exposed to incredibly challenging situations every day that can take a heavy—and often hidden— toll on their mental health.”

“These landmark changes ensure emergency service workers suffering from mental injuries have access to quick and effective support for their mental health, so they don’t have to suffer in silence.”