

ESF IMPACT

newsletter



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Centre of Excellence for Emergency Worker Mental Health to Raise the Bar



The nature of emergency service work means that staff and volunteers are more likely to suffer mental health conditions through exposure to trauma. This often leads people to seek the help of a mental health clinician. Sadly, many of those who have sought help report that finding the 'right' clinician is difficult and that turns them away from treatment, so their health continues to suffer.

Recognising a need for improvement was the impetus for creating a uniquely Victorian Centre of Excellence in Emergency Worker Mental Health. Led by Phoenix Australia and funded by the State Government, the Centre will build the capability of Victorian health professionals to support emergency service workers by:

- Building the awareness and capability of practitioners to meet the needs of emergency workers whose mental health has been impacted by their work.
- Developing a Specialist Network of Clinicians in emergency worker mental health.
- Designing, delivering, and coordinating research and evaluation projects that aim to identify and embed innovative evidence-based mental health treatments.

ESFs most recent Insight conversation discussed why the new Centre is so important with Professor David Forbes from Phoenix, Dr Tony McHugh a practising trauma related therapist, and current serving VicPol detective, Andrew Lawrence. A recording of the conversation is [available here](#).

According to Prof Forbes, "This is about raising the bar so emergency workers can get the best possible evidence - based treatment."

Dr Tony McHugh drew on his extensive experience working with people in the sector to say what has applied until now is not good enough. "This is a once in a generation opportunity to get our approach to treatment right for emergency service workers."

Andrew Lawrence illustrated through lived experience how important it is to have a clinician who "gets the work you do" from the outset and for workers to fully understand what psychological treatment is about.

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REACTIONS

Gallagher Bassett looks forward to the contribution of the Centre of Excellence in building capability and promoting best practice clinical intervention leading to improved recovery outcomes for our community.

Emma Hosking, Gallagher Bassett

It is heartening to hear about The Centre of Excellence for Emergency Worker Mental Health, and how we are moving forward as a society using evidence-based tools and techniques to support our emergency service workers. Upon reflection, I still feel it is difficult for many people to talk about their mental health and mental illness and share stories. Thanks to Andrew for sharing your story with us - your vulnerability and courage shone through and I am sure it was helpful for so many.

Hannah McDougall, VicSES



Having a Centre of Excellence for Emergency Services Workers Mental Health is so important and having quality practitioners that understand emergency services workers is key. Great Insight Conversation!

Peta Southern-Ninnis, Emergency Services Health

The big issue for me is cultural competency in practitioners and how we achieve that. I also think that we may need to hold a mirror up and investigate clinicians to determine any unconscious biases or prejudices that may exist with them that create barriers to the provision of appropriate care.

Cliff Overton, CFA Volunteer