

ESF IMPACT

newsletter

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A MENTAL HEALTH SHOWCASE



ESF hosted its inaugural **Mental Health Showcase** in Melbourne at the end of March. With support from WorkSafe, this event saw 220 wellbeing champions, peer leaders and psychologists, come together to discuss mental health in emergency service workplaces. It was no typical conference. Rather than offer a series of lengthy research presentations, it encouraged participants to question, discuss and share ideas with colleagues.

The opening panel, which shared their lived experience, and a provocative presentation by Dr Don McCreary a Canadian academic and mental health consultant, set the tone of the event, which was to question how to do better. Don made the point that there is so much more we need to understand about mental health in first responders.

There is a lack of longitudinal data that would help us understand how first responder mental health changes over time through their career. If we knew that we could determine the occupational burden of being a first responder by making a comparison with the general population. What is also unknown is how factors such as gender, age and culture impact the mental health burden of individuals. Similarly, he said we need to stop talking mostly about trauma and PTSD as it is not the not the only cause of mental injury. There is so much evidence of the impact of non-traumatic workplace stress caused by general workplace factors, but we do not know how adding trauma as a first responder serves to create a cumulative impact.

As well as promoting understanding of what other industries are doing in the wellbeing space issues discussed included how to approach program evaluation and monitoring, emerging trends, moral injury, the relationship of sleep and rostering to mental health and resources to support families. Ample time for Q and A meant speakers engaged audiences in conversations and workshops to progress ideas and apply learnings to their work.

A dedicated stream on peer support drew a crowd and facilitated a lively conversation about best practice peer support, deployment of peers through the IMT system, and the feasibility of a multi-agency peer program. A highlight for many participants was the showcase of leading practice prevention and peer initiatives



better together

which involved agencies hosting small group conversations to share how they addressed a particular problem and what they learned.

Designed by the sector for the sector, the showcase was a success when measured against the call from practitioners for a 'conference with heart,' where 'we can learn from each other,' and where the sector is not just talking to itself.'



REACTIONS

Firstly, well done! The ESF Mental Health Showcase event was brilliant and a real credit to all of you and your hard work. I have reflected on this event with other Red Cross attendees and feedback was overwhelmingly positive. You sure know how to run an event.

Josiah Park Red Cross

A thoroughly enjoyable and highly productive couple of days. Great interactive sessions that ensured high engagement. It was a privilege to come along and be part of the discussions and to meet so many committed and skilled people doing great work.

Prof Sharon Lawn, Flinders Uni

What a terrific opportunity to hear some fantastic speakers, as well as a great chance at networking.

Paul Fitzgerald SES

It was an excellent two days and a fantastic opportunity to engage with other services and subject matter experts and reflect upon what is working and what is not. I certainly left the showcase reflecting across a range of areas that will help assist in planning and improving mental health strategy in Queensland Ambulance.

Todd Wehr, Queensland Ambulance



ESF Mental Health Showcase



WorkWell

[A recording of Dr McCreary's presentation and other slides from the Showcase are available here.](#)