



ESF - Sofitel Brunch

ESF recently partnered with Sofitel on Collins to host a brunch in celebration of their diamond jubilee. Sofitel wanted to acknowledge people in the sector and how vital they are to the wellbeing of the entire community.



We took the opportunity through a panel discussion to reflect on how mental health has changed over the past 60-years.

Tony Pearce, ESF Chair, reminded the 60 gathered guests how ESF has developed from its beginning almost 40 years ago. Starting as a charity inspired by the loss of 14 CFA volunteers in Ash Wednesday ESF formed to make payments to the families of people who lost their lives in the line of duty and to better understand through scholarships the sorts of hazards that cause such deaths. The scholarship program continues to this day and has made a significant contribution to learning and continuous improvement across the sector. Tony spoke about how the ESF has matured in recent years with a clear focus on mental health prevention and early intervention. Working to get ahead of the mental health harm that often comes with the work people must do to protect our community is no easy task but collaboration with its 15 member organisations and other important stakeholders like WorkSafe and the insurance agents, means that ESF has a very clear line of sight of where improvements can be made. Programs like Leading for Better Mental Health, a development program for team leaders and the Residential Wellbeing Program, a program to help prevent the transition to serious mental injury were two ESF initiatives he pointed to as example of a sector wide evidence informed approach.



Nicole Sadler, ESF Board member and CEO at Phoenix Australia Centre for Post Traumatic Mental health reflected on how community perceptions of mental health have changed over the past 60 years and current priorities in mental health in Australia. She said, "the treatments were pretty barbaric and invasive [60-years ago], things like lobotomies and ECT, things were very heavily stigmatised. We would think about people as being unstable and unpredictable and dangerous if they had mental health problems, luckily we're seeing lots of changes. There are better treatments, we have better systems and much more of a community focus, and we understand mental health problems can come from a whole range of things."



Tim Peck, Deputy Director of Responder Assist, a government funded service that aims to improve the lives of emergency services workers through tailored mental health supports shared his insights gained from the clinical intake and advice service that is open to all Victorian emergency services workers, including those who have retired from service. He said, "It is a high risk industry, agencies need to be able to support their members'. Our data shows about 30% of members openly say they would never reach out to their organisation to get assistance. Agency

leaders need to lead by example and individuals needs to accept that it is a high risk industry and know the recourses available to them".

