



The Hon. Steph Cooke MP
Minister for Emergency Services and Resilience

OFFICIAL

Ref: D22/237

Ms Helen Minnican
Clerk of the Legislative Assembly
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Via email: helen.minnican@parliament.nsw.gov.au
Cc: lawsafety@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Dear Ms ~~Minnican~~ *Helen,*

Please find enclosed a copy of the NSW Government's response to the final report of the Legislative Assembly Law & Safety Committee's inquiry into the physical health of police and emergency services workers in NSW.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Stephanie Cooke'.

The Hon Steph Cooke MP
Minister for Emergency Services and Resilience

3.2.2022.

Encl.: NSW Government Response – Inquiry into the physical health of police and emergency services workers in NSW

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Legislative Assembly Committee on Law and Safety – Physical health of police and emergency services workers in NSW

NSW Government response – February 2022

No.	Recommendation	Response	Comment
1	That the Government consider options to increase the reserve pool of officers to backfill temporary vacancies for all salaried emergency service workers.	Support in principle	<p>The NSW Government notes emergency services agencies already have a number of strategies underway to increase the number of officers that are available to backfill temporary vacancies. Budgets and rosters can factor in ‘reserves’, for example positions that are placed to provide ‘backfill’ of officers on leave (planned and unplanned).</p> <p>NSW Police Force and emergency services agencies will continue looking at options to provide reserve pools in circumstances where backfill is required and appropriate, and where increased surge capacity is required, e.g. during high risk weather season.</p> <p>Agencies will need to take into account the training requirements of any reserve pool. Frontline agencies are heavily reliant on specialist skills, where significant lead time is required to develop required competencies, particularly in operational functions.</p>
2	The Government should review whether emergency service volunteers are adequately supported. The review should focus on how volunteers are allocated to roles, including whether they meet satisfactory WHS standards.	Support	<p>The emergency services agencies have already completed or commenced reviews of support for volunteers, including the assessment of volunteers’ fitness for specialist tasks. Of note:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All clinical volunteers with NSW Ambulance undergo physical and psychological suitability medical assessments and have access to peer support officers, chaplains, psychologists and an external employee assistance program. • NSW State Emergency Service (NSW SES) is working with Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council (AFAC) to better identify fitness-for-duty for its volunteer members; and is looking at the what ongoing support can be provided to help staff and volunteers maintain fitness-for-duty. • Fire + Rescue NSW (FRNSW) has undertaken a Task Analysis for operational members of volunteer Community Fire Units and is in the process of providing

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			<p>Community Fire Unit volunteers with access to FRNSW health, wellbeing, and fitness resources.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The NSW Rural Fire Service (NSW RFS) already requires members in identified specialist functions to undertake medical and/or physical assessments at regular intervals to ensure ongoing suitability. The NSW RFS has also strengthened its medical screening process for new applicants to ensure volunteers meet the physical and medical requirements for the roles they apply to undertake; and expanded its Mental Health Services team to better support members.
3	The Government should consider conducting more research regarding the link between occupational injury, physical fitness and overall health and wellbeing.	Support in principle	<p>The NSW Government has committed \$68.3m over four years for investment in research and technology relating to bush fire and natural hazards, which will consider continuing investment needs in this space.</p> <p>The NSW Government notes the existing research commissioned by the emergency services agencies which has already been used to inform and shape the health and wellbeing programs in place for staff and volunteers; and supports the evaluation of these programs, as required, to validate the efficacy of programs. The emergency services agencies welcome further research, as required, into the links between occupational injury, physical fitness and overall health and wellbeing to ensure programs continue to reflect best practice. Agencies also note the benefits of sharing their findings with each other where they have overlapping issues and interests.</p> <p>Strengthening research and knowledge management is a continuing priority in an updated sector mental health and wellbeing strategy over the next five years.</p>
4	That the Government consider introducing a periodic health check to support police and NSW Ambulance workers' physical and mental health.	Support in principle	<p>This recommendation will be considered further in the context of work already occurring within the NSW Police Force and NSW Ambulance and other factors such as relevance to the specific requirements of officers' roles, cost and industrial implications. These and other considerations were acknowledged in the Committee's Report, and reflected in Finding 5 that any health standards should be tailored against the specific requirements of the role.</p> <p>The NSW Police Force Mental Wellbeing Strategy 2020-2025 encompasses a framework of support mechanisms that focus on physical and mental health. Through its WellCheck Program, the NSW Police Force provides a mental health monitoring service to assist staff in roles that potentially increase the risk of psychological injury. Periodic physical health checks are required for some specialist roles and the NSW</p>

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			<p>Police Force is currently reviewing whether these existing processes can be more fully utilised.</p> <p>NSW Ambulance is currently reviewing the current pre-employment health screening to reflect job requirements. Industrial implications, cost and impact of results on staffing levels would need to be considered prior to introducing periodic health checks.</p>
5	<p>That the Government consider a more targeted evaluation of each program to identify how the programs can deliver better outcomes for their workers.</p>	<p>Support in principle</p>	<p>As noted in the response to Recommendation 3, the NSW Government supports evaluation of health and wellbeing programs to ensure programs are evidence-based, and notes the existing work underway in the emergency services agencies to evaluate programs based on their effectiveness and impact on individuals and the organisation.</p> <p>The NSW Government notes the Committee's supportive comments on current programs to promote health and fitness of police and emergency service workers, including that they are comprehensive, include access to health coaching and assessments, injury prevention specialists, and fitness facilities.</p>
6	<p>NSW Ambulance to provide further investment in equipment that assists in manual handling, helping to prevent manual handling injuries.</p>	<p>Support in principle</p>	<p>NSW Ambulance is committed to ensuring the safety of its workforce and reducing the risk and instances of injury.</p> <p>The NSW Government invested \$30 million in 2017 over five years for NSW Ambulance to facilitate health and wellbeing programs. This funding has supported the roll out of 2,010 pieces of manual handling equipment across the Service. The roll out of this equipment is underway and is due to be completed by June 2022. Once implementation is complete, ongoing work will be done to assess the impact this equipment has had on reducing manual handling injury.</p>
7	<p>That the Government should look for more opportunities to formalise return to work pathways for injured salaried emergency service workers.</p>	<p>Support in principle</p>	<p>The NSW Government supports effective management of workplace injuries and illnesses and supports return-to-work where safe and appropriate. Agencies will continue to monitor and build on their existing return-to-work processes as appropriate to identify approaches or pathways that could be explored further.</p>