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Legislative Assembly Committee on Law and Safety

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Physical health of police and emergency services workers in NSW



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The motto of the coat of arms for the state of New South Wales is “Orta recens quam pura nites”. It is written in Latin and means “newly risen, how brightly you shine”.

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Membership

Chair	Mrs Wendy Tuckerman MP
Deputy Chair	Mr Mark Taylor MP
Members	Mr Edmond Atalla MP Ms Steph Cooke MP Ms Tamara Smith MP
Contact details	Law and Safety Committee Parliament House Macquarie Street SYDNEY NSW 2000
E-mail	lawsafety@parliament.nsw.gov.au
Website	www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/committees

Chair's foreword

As Chair of the Legislative Assembly Committee on Law and Safety, I extend my thanks to those who contributed to this inquiry into the physical health of police and emergency services in NSW.

I acknowledge every police and emergency service worker including volunteers, for their role in protecting our communities and saving lives. I convey our gratitude for the work they do, and the risk they take, which impacts on their physical and mental health, while carrying out those duties.

During this inquiry we heard evidence from a range of stakeholders about the types of work that police and emergency service workers do and the impact that this work has on their physical health. We heard about standards and programs that are currently in place and how different workforces manage injury and a return to work of employees. That evidence informs the recommendations and findings set out in the report. The recommendations aim to minimise workplace injuries and consider improvements in government programs and initiatives for workers' physical health.

While the inquiry identified that there are some areas of improvement that could be enhanced to further support police and emergency service workers, it was pleasing to hear about their existing programs that are dedicated to improving the health and wellbeing of these workers.

I thank my fellow Committee members for their valuable contributions to the inquiry process, and Committee staff for their hard work and professionalism.



Wendy Tuckerman MP
Chair

Executive Summary

Police and emergency service workers are at the frontline of protecting the community and saving lives while undertaking work that is physically and mentally demanding. In the case of an emergency, they respond to situations in order to protect and ensure the safety of people and property and also respond to the disruption of essential services or infrastructure.

This inquiry focuses on how the day-to-day work of police and emergency services workers in NSW impact their physical health. We also look into the physical entry requirements for police and emergency service workers, identify potential areas for improvement and the impacts of health and safety issues on workplace management for police and emergency services organisations.

We received a variety of submissions including from NSW Government emergency services agencies such as the NSW Police Force, NSW Ambulance, Fire & Rescue NSW, NSW Rural Fire Service and NSW State Emergency Service as well as unions representing police and emergency service workers.

In this report we make 7 recommendations and 10 findings aimed at reducing workplace injuries for police and emergency service workers and improvements in government programs and initiatives for workers' physical health.

Chapter one of the report looks at the physically demanding nature of the work performed by police and emergency service workers including volunteers and the diverse range of that work. We heard from emergency service workers such as paramedics, unions and representatives of government agencies. Their evidence painted a picture of the heavy demands of the work, including long work hours, lifting and carrying people and equipment and stress.

We examine the rate of injuries experienced by police and emergency service workers and the nature of those injuries, noting the high rate of injury suffered by paramedics and the increasing rate of injuries experienced by police. The impacts on health not directly related to injuries was also examined, often as a result of working arrangements, such as hours of work and limits to the number available staff.

During the inquiry, it was apparent that physical and mental health are interrelated. While mental health is outside the terms of reference of this inquiry, we acknowledge this link.

Chapter two examines the fitness standards required in order to ensure that workers are able to safely perform roles within police or emergency service agencies. The tests used by agencies to assess fitness of workers against standards are outlined.

We review physical entry requirements for police and emergency workers including volunteers. We also investigate different health and fitness standards and how they are applied to ensure that workers are capable of safely performing roles across different agencies.

As part of the inquiry, we look into whether standards should be mandatory, taking into account the potential benefits that might result from mandatory standards. We also consider the potential negative consequences of mandatory standards, such as discrimination against certain classes of workers. We emphasise that where such a standard is introduced it should be tailored against the specific requirements of each particular role.

We recommend that the Government to consider more research into the links between physical fitness, mental health and occupational injury and utilise an evidence based approach in the provision physical fitness and injury prevention.

Chapter three examines the programs currently in place to support the health and fitness of emergency service workers. We explore the potential strategies to minimise the number of injuries experienced by these workers. Some measures we examine include the increased availability of mechanical lifting aids and mechanical cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) devices for paramedics; and the roll out of body worn cameras.

We also consider current programs and policies which offer rehabilitation to injured workers in order to facilitate their return to work and how they can be improved. We look at the potential provided by the NSW Government's "Capability Framework" for injured police officers to be transferred to suitable roles within the wider public service, and the increased scope for injured paramedics to be transferred to other roles within NSW Health as a result of paramedics being recognised as a profession.

We conclude this chapter by recommending that an increase of the availability of mechanical aids for paramedics and that the Government should explore the potential expansion of return to work pathways for injured workers across all emergency service agencies.

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Chapter One – The role of physical health in policing and emergency service work

The work of police and emergency service workers

Summary

Police and emergency service workers are at the frontline of protecting the community and saving lives while undertaking work that is physically and mentally demanding.

Finding 1

The work of police and emergency service workers is physically demanding and varies from role to role.

- 1.1 Police and emergency service workers are at the frontline of protecting the community and saving lives. In the case of an emergency, they respond to situations in order to protect and ensure the safety of people and property and also respond to the disruption of essential services or infrastructure.¹
- 1.2 During the inquiry, we heard from a variety of Government emergency services agencies including NSW Police Force, NSW Ambulance, Fire & Rescue NSW, NSW Rural Fire Service and NSW State Emergency Service as well as unions that represent these workers.
- 1.3 The Public Service Association of NSW told us that there are some roles in the public sector that are not considered as an ‘emergency service worker’ even though they play a similar role in responding to emergencies, such as corrective service officers.²
- 1.4 Although roles vary within and between each emergency service agency, generally speaking, the nature of the policing and emergency service work is physically and emotionally demanding.
- 1.5 There is a high risk of injury and body stressing in emergency service work.³ In particular, we heard that workers in the ambulance service experience the highest rates of serious injury of any profession in Australia, particularly in New South Wales. Most non-fatal injuries are muscle stresses associated with lifting, carrying or putting down objects or people. The table below outlines just some of the equipment they are required to carry as part of their everyday duties.⁴

¹ [State Emergency and Rescue Management Act 1989, section 4](#). “Emergency” is defined in section 4 of the State Emergency and Rescue Management Act 1989.

² Ms Nicole Jess, President, Public Service Association of NSW, [Transcript of evidence](#), 10 May 2021, p 18.

³ Body stressing is a collective term covering a broad range of health problems associated with repetitive and strenuous work. (Australian Government, [Comcare](#)), webpage, accessed on 29 June 2021.

⁴ [Submission 1](#), Health Services Union, pp 1-2; [Submission 5](#), NSW Government, p 5 (NSW Health), p 13 (NSWPF), & p 28 (FRNSW).

Equipment load for police and emergency service workers

Police and emergency service workers carry large and heavy equipment as part of their job. Outlined below is a summary of the equipment load police and emergency service workers carry.

- A paramedic is required to be able to carry equipment weighing up to 24 kilograms, if working as a dual responder and 36 kilograms if a solo responder, including upstairs.
- A general duties police officer is required to carry up to 8-12 kg of equipment such as their firearm, handcuffs, pepper spray and extendible baton. For some police officers, they carry an additional 20% of their body weight.
- A fire fighter may wear up to 20kgs of protective equipment depending of their body weight.

1.6 For paramedics, we heard that body stress injuries are directly related to a their day to day job. Mr Steve Fraser, a NSW Ambulance paramedic on behalf of the Health Services Union, described how injuries can happen during the course of their work. He told us that:

When you are taught to lift you are taught to keep your back straight, bend your knees ... sometimes you are pulling someone out from underneath a train, sometimes you are leaning forward to get to someone who is stuck behind a door and you cannot open the door, so it is not always possible.⁵

1.7 Similarly, fire fighters face high risks of physical injury. According to Fire & Rescue NSW, 60 per cent of workplace injury is attributed to body stressing.⁶ As well as performing physically demanding activity in response to incidents, fire fighters work in environments where their physical safety may be threatened.

1.8 In comparison, we heard that physical activities are just one element of policing. While there are times when policing requires physical activity, we were told that it is not prevalent in the day-to-day work of police and other skills such as communication, de-escalation, time management are just as important.⁷

1.9 However, we heard that the rate of physical injury for police, particularly in body stressing, is increasing. According to the NSW Police Force, the overall claim rate for workers compensation has increased to 18.93 percent in 2018-2019 compared to the 15.35 percent in 2014-2015.⁸ Significantly, as of 30 April 2021, 16 percent of police officers in NSW have an open workers compensation claim and within this group, 25 percent are on workers compensation leave.⁹

Physical demands of shift work

Finding 2

Single paramedic deployment places increased risk on the physical health of workers

⁵ Mr Steve Fraser, Health Services Union (NSW Ambulance Paramedic), [Transcript of evidence](#), 10 May 2021, p 4.

⁶ Ms Alison Donohoe, Director, Work Health & Safety, Fire and Rescue NSW, [Transcript of evidence](#), 10 May 2021, p 32.

⁷ [Submission 3](#), Police Association of NSW, p 4.

⁸ [Submission 5](#), NSW Government, p 16 (NSWPF).

⁹ [Answers to Questions on Notice](#), NSW Police Force, p 1.

Recommendation 1

That the Government consider options to increase the reserve pool of officers to backfill temporary vacancies for all salaried emergency service workers.

- 1.10 We also heard that the work of police and emergency service workers is a 24 hour a day, 7 day a week job. They work long hours, perform physically tiring jobs and are rostered on shift work at all hours of the day.¹⁰
- 1.11 A paramedic is usually rostered for 12 hours shift however sometimes it can be extended to 15 hour shifts. Ms Tess Oxley, a NSW Ambulance paramedic on behalf of the Health Services Union, told us that due to the nature of their work, from last minute calls or delays, paramedics may work beyond their shift hours. She stressed that patient safety comes first, and sometimes the officers' safety concern for themselves is lacking.¹¹
- 1.12 Critically, we received evidence that shift work impacts on workers' sleeping patterns, increases fatigue, detracts from engaging in regular physical fitness activity and increases poor dietary choices. This can lead to a decrease of physical health including an increase in body weight which can be exacerbated over time and/or increase the risk of injury.¹²
- 1.13 The roster system can also affect the physical health of police and emergency service workers. We consider that increasing the reserve pool of officers to backfill temporary vacancies for all salaried emergency service workers would reduce this impact.
- 1.14 We were told that that single deployment rostering for paramedics, due to understaffing or work shortages, places a high risk on those workers. This concern is not related to solo operators who are extended care paramedics, or to motorcycle paramedics who are trained and deployed under controlled guidelines.¹³
- 1.15 In some cases, paramedics go to call outs alone as 'there is no one else to go'. Even if some incidents appear to be harmless, such as a person who has fallen, it can result in injuries to the paramedic. The Health Services Union explained that a paramedic, even on their own, will not stand by and do nothing to assist. They added:

[if] there is an elderly person and he has slipped in the bathroom and is lying face down with a head injury between the toilet and the bath, and as a single paramedic you are not going to stand there and do nothing and wait until backup arrives. You are going to do something to get that person at least out of that position. They are the things where injuries are happening.¹⁴

¹⁰ [Submission 5](#), NSW Government, p 11 (NSWPF).

¹¹ Ms Tess Oxley, Health Services Union (NSW Ambulance Paramedic), [Transcript of evidence](#), 10 May 2021, p 3.

¹² [Submission 5](#), NSW Government, pp 13-14 (NSWPF).

¹³ Mr Steve Fraser, [Transcript of evidence](#), p 2.

¹⁴ Mr Steve Fraser, [Transcript of evidence](#), pp 2-3.

- 1.16 Increasing the reserve pool of officers to backfill temporary vacancies for all salaried emergency service workers may alleviate the pressure from the rostering system. We note that NSW Ambulance backfills known vacancies with part-time or casual workers, however this is limited with their availability and dependent on the number of hours they have already worked in the week.¹⁵
- 1.17 This is even more prevalent in regional and rural areas as emergency service workers face more stresses due to smaller staffing numbers, and are responsible for covering larger distances compared to metropolitan areas. For example, in some rural areas, there is a minimum of one ambulance with a crew of two paramedics that would serve the population driving across a large distance.¹⁶
- 1.18 We were pleased to hear, however, that NSW Ambulance is committed to removing all rosters that require the deployment of single officers. Dr Dominic Morgan, Commissioner and Chief Executive, NSW Ambulance told us that the roster system that was introduced in 2013 and which involved a weekly roster placement for a single officer, is in the process of reform.¹⁷
- 1.19 Fire & Rescue NSW also outlined staffing constraints in regional areas. They said that significant resources are invested into attracting, recruiting and retaining firefighters in regional areas due to a higher proportion of applicants not progressing to employment because of medical conditions or limited physical abilities that are incompatible with safety critical firefighting work.¹⁸

Emergency Service Volunteers

Summary

A large proportion of emergency service workers are volunteers. Even though they are not salaried staff, they still face similar risks to their physical health and safety.

Recommendation 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.

- 1.20 A large proportion of emergency service workers are volunteers. They are part of the NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS) and the NSW State Emergency Services (SES). Both organisations are largely volunteer based with approximately 71, 000 RFS volunteers and approximately 10, 500 SES volunteers.¹⁹
- 1.21 As volunteers represent a large number of emergency service workers in New South Wales, we are recommending that the Government review whether volunteers are adequately supported. The review should focus on how volunteers

¹⁵ Ms Tess Oxley, [Transcript of evidence](#), p 3.

¹⁶ Mr Steve Fraser, [Transcript of evidence](#), pp 4-5.

¹⁷ Dr Dominic Morgan, Chief Executive, NSW Ambulance, [Transcript of evidence](#), 10 May 2021, p 26.

¹⁸ [Submission 5](#), NSW Government, p 31 (FRNSW).

¹⁹ [Submission 5](#), NSW Government, p 33 (NSWRFS), & p 41 (NSW SES).

The role of physical health in policing and emergency service work

are allocated to roles, including whether they meet satisfactory WHS standards to ensure their protection and support during and after their duties.

- 1.22 Volunteers within the RFS and SES have many different roles. These range from office based support to frontline operational activities which include firefighting (for RFS), natural disaster response (for SES), general land rescue and road crash rescue. We received some evidence that the RFS and SES also assist other emergency service workers, such as the police and paramedics in some emergency situations.²⁰
- 1.23 Many operational roles of volunteers can be physically demanding. Similar to other emergency service workers, this may involve carrying heavy equipment, lifting people and objects, cardiovascular fitness and performing duties in high risk environments.
- 1.24 The RFS and SES told us that they have procedures in place to ensure that volunteers are 'fit for task' upon entering the organisation. RFS and SES volunteers complete a medical declaration as part of their membership application and then an interview for vetting.²¹
- 1.25 Some specialist roles in the RFS and SES, even as a volunteer, require regular medical and physical fitness assessments. This is to ensure that volunteers can perform specialist tasks such as arduous firefighting and helicopter search and rescue for RFS volunteers; and land search operations, flood rescue operators and vertical rescue for SES volunteers. Mandatory physical requirements will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.
- 1.26 We understand that volunteers face physical injuries as a result of performing their duties within the RFS and SES. Although we are pleased to hear that volunteers are covered by workers compensation, we received evidence that during the Black Summer bushfires in 2019-2020, the number of compensation claims from RFS volunteers rose to 417 compared to the 163 in the previous year.²²
- 1.27 In the SES, a majority of reported workplace injuries are from volunteers. Although workers compensation claims in 2019-2020 decreased compared to the previous year, approximately 98% of workplace injuries to volunteers are physical. The majority of physical injuries, 36 percent, are from traumatic joint/ligament and muscle/tendon injury.²³
- 1.28 We note that there are no mandatory ongoing checks for volunteers regarding their physical health and fitness. The RFS told us that that they support their

²⁰ [Submission 5](#), NSW Government, p 41 (NSW SES).

²¹ [Submission 5](#), NSW Government, pp 35-36 (NSW RFS); Mr Peter McKechnie, Deputy Commissioner Field Operations, NSW Rural Fire Service, [Transcript of evidence](#), 10 May 2021, p 32.

²² NSW Rural Fire Service, [Service Standard 7.1.3 Workers compensation for NSW RFS volunteers](#), NSW Government, 9 April 2020, accessed on 16 July 2021; [Answers to Questions on notice](#), NSW Rural Fire Service, p 2.

²³ NSW State Emergency Service, [NSW SES Annual Report 2019-2020](#), NSW Government, 1 July 2020, p 77.

volunteers and staff through internal health checks that are available for their volunteer members.²⁴

- 1.29 We commend the Government for having these initiatives available for volunteers. However, we call for the Government to consider our recommendation regarding a review whether volunteers are adequately supported.

Mental health

Summary

Physical health is inextricably linked with mental health. The physical nature of the work of police and emergency service workers impacts their mental health.

Finding 3

Physical health is inextricably linked with mental health.

- 1.30 Our inquiry focuses on the physical health of police and emergency workers. However, during the inquiry process many stakeholders told us that physical health is inextricably linked with mental health.²⁵ While mental health is not the focus of this inquiry, we acknowledge this strong link.
- 1.31 The physical nature of the work of police and emergency service workers impacts their mental health. We heard that recovery from physical injury affects mental health, particularly if injuries are ongoing or if injuries affect a worker's ability to return to work. The Police Association of NSW added that police officers with physical injuries spend less time off work compared with injuries associated with mental health.²⁶
- 1.32 We understand that another contributing factor between mental health and physical health is mental stressors from work duties. This includes fatigue from working long and shift work hours which can increase risks to physical injury and also exposure to traumatic emergency situations.²⁷
- 1.33 The number of workplace health injuries attributed to mental health is increasing. For police officers, we note that a significant proportion of time off work due to injury is caused by psychological injury. The Health Services Union told us that 17 percent of injuries of paramedics are attributed to mental health.²⁸

²⁴ Ms Lisa Chih, Director, Health and Safety, NSW Rural Fire Service, [Transcript of evidence](#), 10 May 2021, p 34.

²⁵ [Submission 1](#), Health Service Union, p 5; [Submission 3](#), Police Association of NSW, p 3; [Submission 4](#), Public Service Association of NSW and Community and Public Sector Union NSW, p 5; Ms Nicole Jess, [Transcript of evidence](#), p 18; Dr Dominic Morgan, [Transcript of evidence](#), p 25.

²⁶ [Submission 1](#), Health Service Union, pp 3-4; [Submission 3](#), Police Association of NSW, p 5; [Submission 4](#), Public Service Association of NSW and Community and Public Sector Union NSW, p 6; [Submission 5](#), NSW Government, p 6 (NSW Health).

²⁷ [Submission 1](#), Health Service Union, p 5; Ms Jess, [Transcript of evidence](#), p 20.

²⁸ [Submission 1](#), Health Service Union, p 2; [Submission 3](#), Police Association of NSW, p 5; [Submission 5](#), NSW Government, p 17 (NSWPF).

- 1.34 We are pleased that the NSW Government also acknowledges the link between physical and mental health. We were told about their strategies and commitment to improving the physical and mental wellbeing of police and emergency services workers. We discuss these initiatives in more detail in Chapter 3.

Chapter Two – Physical fitness of police and emergency service workers

Physical entry requirements

Summary

There are physical entry requirements when becoming a police officer or emergency service worker in New South Wales. These requirements highlight the physically demanding nature of the work that they do and the role of physical fitness in some of their duties.

Finding 4:

The Committee supports physical entry requirements of police and emergency services workers.

- 2.1 Inquiry participants told us about the physical entry requirements prior to becoming a police or emergency service worker.²⁹ We note that the physical entry requirements of police and emergency service workers highlights the interrelationship between physical fitness and physical health.
- 2.2 Health is defined as a state of complete mental, physical and social well-being; not just the absence of illness.³⁰ Fitness is the ability to meet the demands of the environment. As discussed in the next section, physical entry requirements that are measured against physical fitness also include aspects related to a person's physical health such as strength, endurance, body composition and flexibility.
- 2.3 Overall, we support the continued application of the physical entry requirements for police and emergency service workers. These requirements reflect the occupational needs of these roles but also highlight their physically demanding nature in terms of fitness levels and the impact on their physical health.

NSW Health (NSW Ambulance)

- 2.4 NSW Ambulance told us that they use the Paramedic Health Standard to help define the level of health and fitness required for paramedics to perform their role. The table below is a summary of the physical health attributes for paramedics to enable them to perform their duties.³¹

Health attribute	Paramedic requirement
Vision	Good acuity for near and far vision, full visual fields and colour vision.

²⁹ [Submission 1](#), Health Services Union, p 4; [Submission 3](#), Police Association of NSW, p 4; [Submission 5](#), NSW Government, p 7 (NSW Health), pp 27-28 (FRNSW), pp 34-35 (NSW RFS), p 42 (NSW SES).

³⁰ World Health Organisation, [Constitution of the World Health Organisation](#), 45th edition, supplement, October 2006, accessed on 5 August 2021, p 1.

³¹ [Submission 5](#), NSW Government, pp 6-7 (NSW Health).

Physical fitness of police and emergency service workers

Hearing	Ability to hear speech and stethoscope sounds in noise > 85 decibels.
Cognition and absence of risk of collapse	The paramedic is required not to be affected by any conditions or impairments to the extent that such conditions/impairments are predictably capable of affecting the paramedic's capacity to deliver service through cognitive impairment or collapse, e.g. blackouts, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, neurological conditions (including dementia, epilepsy, vestibular and other neurological), psychiatric conditions, sleep disorders and substance misuse, or drug or alcohol impairment.
Musculoskeletal	Musculoskeletal strength, endurance, range of movement, coordination and dexterity is required to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • walk to the patient over rough, slippery or sloping terrain and up flights of stairs • lift equipment up to 12kg in weight from head height with one arm • assemble, stabilise and utilise lifting aids such as carry chairs and stretchers • lift loads including equipment weighing 24kg if a dual responder or 36kg if a solo responder • lift patients using equipment and assistance regularly up to 50kg and occasionally up to 60kg • perform CPR • use tools and equipment with a strong and controlled grip in each hand.
Aerobic capacity	The paramedic is required to be able to carry equipment weighing 24kg if a dual responder or 36kg if a solo responder, including upstairs.

2.5 The same standard is used at the pre-employment stage to establish that applicants meet these requirements. As part of the application process, applicants are required to undergo a health assessment, composed of three parts: a blood test, medical assessment, and a physical fitness assessment.³²

2.6 We note that the physical fitness assessment measures the applicants' ability to meet the physical demands of the paramedic role, particularly in the categories of flexibility, strength, power, endurance, and aerobic capacity. The assessment includes several tasks, such as:

- Hover test: applicants need to support their body weight between toes and elbow, with back and legs held straight for at least 60 seconds
- Carry load test: applicants need to safely lift and carry 2 weighted bags (total maximum weight of 36 kg) and ascend and descend one storey of stairs twice in less than 90 seconds.

³² NSW Ambulance, [Recruitment and Selection Graduate Paramedic Intern Guide](#), NSW Government, May 2020, p 10.

- Shoulder lift test: applicants need to reach and lift a 12 kg weighted bag near shoulder height and carry with the same arm.³³

NSW Police Force

- 2.7 NSW Police Force told us that a sufficient level of physical capability is necessary to safely and effectively perform their work. They said that the inability to perform physical aspects of police work may endanger the safety of officers and the general public.³⁴
- 2.8 We understand that as part of the application process, applicants are required to undertake a Physical Capacity Test. The test replicates physical stresses and activities that officers may face during the work of an operational police officer.³⁵
- 2.9 These physical entry requirements are related to the training program delivered at the NSW Police Force Academy. As part of the program, recruits learn police powers, defensive tactics and participate in physical training sessions.³⁶
- 2.10 The table below outlines the elements of the Physical Capacity Test:

	Handgrip strength	Prone Bridge (the 'plank')	Vertical Jump	Push Ups	Illinois Agility (speed and agility test)	Multi-stage Fitness (also known as the beep test)
Minimum Standard	30kg on each hand	90 seconds	30cm or greater	25	20 seconds or less	Level 7.1
Attempts Allowed	2	1	2	1	2	1

- 2.11 A medical assessment is also conducted on all police recruit applicants. These assessments include providing a detailed medical history and applicants who are 35 years old and above are required to complete further cardiovascular tests.³⁷
- 2.12 Additionally, all NSW Police Force applicants must complete psychometric testing as part of the selection process. The test assesses psychological functioning and which is then followed by an interview with a psychologist to assess their suitability for the role.³⁸

³³ [Recruitment and Selection Graduate Paramedic Intern Guide](#), p 12.

³⁴ [Submission 5](#), NSW Government, p 12 (NSWPF).

³⁵ NSW Government, NSW Police Force & Charles Sturt University, 'NSW Police Recruitment', [Physical Capacity Testing](#), webpage, accessed on 15 June 2021.

³⁶ [Submission 5](#), NSW Government, p 15 (NSWPF).

³⁷ NSW Police Force & Charles Sturt University, 'NSW Police Recruitment', [Physical & Medical Assessment](#), NSW Government, webpage, accessed on 15 June 2021.

³⁸ [Physical & Medical Assessment](#), webpage, accessed on 15 June 2021.

Fire & Rescue NSW (FRNSW)

- 2.13 Fire & Rescue NSW told us that as part of its pre-employment recruitment processes, they require all applicants applying for firefighting positions to complete the Physical Aptitude Test (PAT) and Pre-employment Health Assessment (PHA).³⁹
- 2.14 The PAT consists of tasks which simulate work carried out by firefighters at emergency incidents, and is used to assess whether a candidate's level of fitness is suitable for a career as a firefighter. The PAT is designed specifically to 'identify and recruit individuals who are physiologically capable of tolerating the work-related demands of firefighting'. The table below is an overview of the PAT protocols.⁴⁰

Stage (time limit)	Activity
Stage 1 (not timed)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simulated Room Search • Ladder Simulation
Stage 2 (all tasks to be completed 15 minutes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hazardous materials – unilateral load carriage (distance 195m (6.5x30m) / 26kg). • Team carry up staircase – unilateral load carriage up staircase (36 steps (26cm) / 17.5kg) • Motor vehicle accident rescue – static hold of simulated rescue tool (19.5kg / 3 x 40 second holds) • Hose advance / bushfire – charged hose drag (300m (10 x 30m shuttles, 5 loaded and 5 unloaded recovery walks)), resistive load equivalent to 30m of 38mm charged firefighting hose (265N (horizontal) + 11kg hose (vertical)).
Stage 3 (all tasks to be completed under 2 minutes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structural firefighting – fire attack crawling position (height restriction 1.25m: distance 60m (2 x 30m shuttles, 1 loaded and 1 unloaded recovery walk), resistive load as per hose advance task) • Firefighter rescue (height restriction 1.55m: distance 10m), resistive load equivalent to rescuing a 82kg firefighter wearing 20kg of personal protective equipment (550N (horizontal) + 30kg (vertical)).

- 2.15 According to FRNSW, their pre-employment health assessment (PHA) is a 'risk assessment approach' to ensure applicants are medically suitable for the job. The process is comprehensive due to the high physical demands of the job, work undertaken in hazardous environments and the safety critical nature of the role for the individual, crew and community.⁴¹

³⁹ [Submission 5](#), NSW Government, p 27 (FRNSW).

⁴⁰ [Submission 5](#), NSW Government, pp 27-28 (FRNSW); NSW Government, Fire and Rescue NSW, 'Firefighter recruitment', [Physical Aptitude Test](#), webpage, accessed on 15 June 2021.

⁴¹ Fire and Rescue NSW, [Becoming a permanent \(full time\) fire fighter](#), NSW Government, 2020, accessed on 7 July 2021, p 15.

- 2.16 We were told that the PHA is conducted by or assessed by the FRNSW Occupational Physician. The PHA includes a health questionnaire – including the collection of relevant medical history, medical tests such as blood, hearing and cardiovascular tests.⁴²
- 2.17 FRNSW emphasised in their submission that there is a ‘legally defensible’ physical standard for their workforce. Their health and fitness assessments aim to balance work health and safety risks, while making reasonable accommodations where possible to avoid unlawful discrimination.⁴³ We accept this reasoning and further stress that their work requires a high level of physical fitness.

NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS)

- 2.18 NSW Rural Fire Services told us that their salaried staff members require pre-employment physical and medical assessments. The physical assessment includes an ‘Arduous Pack Test’ which involves a 4.83km walk while carrying a 20.4kg vest, in less than 45 minutes.⁴⁴
- 2.19 As discussed in Chapter 1, RFS volunteers do not have physical entry requirements. New volunteers are required to complete a medical declaration, attend an interview at their local fire brigade, and undergo a criminal history record check. They then will initially obtain probationary membership (for a minimum 6 month period) and commence induction training.⁴⁵

NSW State Emergency Service (SES)

- 2.20 The NSW SES is predominantly a volunteer organisation, however the SES told us that they have specialist operational roles. These roles require a ‘fit-for-task’ assessment to determine the suitability of a person in the role. These assessments are required for entry and also as an ongoing requirement. The table below details these assessments.

Physical entry requirements for specialist roles in SES	
Role	Requirements
Land Search Operations	Members participating in Land Search Operations are required to maintain a high level of physical fitness. There are minimum levels of training and fitness requirements for each search capability role. These requirements include hikes that must meet a certain distance or time and include a specified weighted pack.
Flood Rescue Operators and Boat Operators	Members undertaking roles as Flood Rescue Operators and Boat Operators are required to successfully complete both a swim test and a fitness test. Prior to undertaking these tests, members are required to do a self-assessment (IMSAFE) of their capability considering any conditions known to the member. The NSW SES swim test and fitness assessment needs to be conducted once every three (3) years to maintain currency.

⁴² [Submission 5](#), NSW Government, p 29 (NSWPF).

⁴³ [Submission 5](#), NSW Government, p 28 (NSWPF).

⁴⁴ [Submission 5](#), NSW Government, p 36 & 38 (NSW RFS); NSW Rural Fire Service, [Join our Mitigation crews](#), NSW Government, webpage, accessed on 15 June 2021.

⁴⁵ [Submission 5](#), NSW Government, p 38 (NSW RFS); NSW Rural Fire Service, [10 Steps to becoming a volunteer](#), NSW Government, accessed on 7 July 2021.

Vertical Rescue	Members undertaking Vertical Rescue roles are required to maintain a level of fitness to meet the fit-for-task requirements of Vertical Rescue. This includes ongoing Vertical rescue training every 12 months involving a range of skills, a pack test and a timed rope ascent.
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Ongoing physical fitness

Recommendation 3

The Government should consider conducting more research regarding the link between occupational injury, physical fitness and overall health and wellbeing.

- 2.21 We consider that beyond physical entry requirements, there is a continued role of ongoing physical fitness for police and emergency service workers. The Police Association of NSW told us that there is evidence that ongoing physical fitness improves the overall health and wellbeing of workers in these roles.⁴⁶
- 2.22 We also heard that maintaining physical fitness improves the performance of some tasks and possibly reduces the risk of physical injuries. As discussed in Chapter 1, police and emergency services carry loads of equipment to every job they attend.⁴⁷
- 2.23 Some stakeholders, such as NSW Ambulance and NSW Police Force, acknowledge the role of physical fitness in their workforce and provide access to fitness/gym equipment in every station, as well as gym passes.⁴⁸ Other submissions also called for allocating paid time for workers to participate in fitness training during work hours.⁴⁹
- 2.24 We are also interested in the link between improved physical fitness, mental health and injury prevention. The Police Association of NSW suggested that providing opportunities for police officers to train while on duty improves their overall health and wellbeing.⁵⁰
- 2.25 However, we heard contrary evidence regarding the relationship between aspects of physical fitness and occupational injury in emergency service workers as it is 'extremely limited'. Some stakeholders are concerned that too much emphasis is placed on general physical fitness and not preventative measures against injury.⁵¹
- 2.26 The Health Services Union also told us that even if there are fitness programs or equipment that are available to workers, it is often difficult to incorporate physical fitness as part of a workers' routine due to high case load and fatigue.⁵²

⁴⁶ [Submission 3](#), Police Association of NSW, pp 2-3.

⁴⁷ See [Case Study 1](#) in Chapter 1.

⁴⁸ [Submission 1](#), Health Services Union, p 4; [Submission 5](#), NSW Government, p 8 (NSW Health), & p 21 (NSWPF).

⁴⁹ [Submission 1](#), Health Services Union, p 6; [Submission 3](#), Police Association of NSW, p 7.

⁵⁰ [Submission 3](#), Police Association of NSW, p 7.

⁵¹ [Submission 1](#), Health Services Union, p 3; [Submission 4](#), Public Service Association of NSW and Community and Public Sector Union NSW, p 4.

⁵² [Submission 1](#), Health Services Union, p 4.

- 2.27 We acknowledge these concerns and recommend that the Government should consider an evidence based approach when providing physical fitness options and injury prevention to their workers.

Mandatory physical standard

Summary

Some emergency service workers have ongoing mandatory fitness standards as part of their work. While the NSW Government is not introducing a mandatory standard to other agencies, if they do, it should be tailored against the specific requirements of the role.

Finding 5

If a mandatory standard is introduced for police and emergency service workers, it should be tailored against the specific requirements of the role.

- 2.28 Some emergency service workers have ongoing mandatory fitness standards, namely Fire & Rescue NSW. They told us that their mandatory health and fitness programs help ‘shift the agency towards a more proactive culture of maintaining optimal health and fitness’.⁵³
- 2.29 We are interested in Fire & Rescue NSW’s standard on mandatory physical assessments. Ms Alison Donohoe, Director, Work Health and Safety, Fire and Rescue NSW explained that their mandatory physical assessments are not a ‘pass or fail testing situation’. She told us that it is an age based annual assessment:
- until the age of 60 it is every five years, between 60 and 65 it is every two years and then, after 65, annually, unless after that or as a result of that first assessment that is undertaken there is a need for more regular monitoring, and that would be determined by the independent occupational physician who we have overseeing that process.⁵⁴
- 2.30 We were also pleased to hear that as part of their mandatory physical assessments, Fire & Rescue NSW ensures that firefighters continue to work in the organisation in non-frontline work if they are deemed not fit for duties.⁵⁵
- 2.31 Other emergency service agencies such as policing, ambulance and volunteer services do not have ongoing mandatory fitness standards. However, we heard that there are exceptions in some specialists’ roles that require a high level of physical fitness. The table below provides details of mandatory physical assessments in NSW emergency services.

⁵³ [Submission 5](#), NSW Government, p 30 (FRNSW).

⁵⁴ Ms Alison Donohoe, [Transcript of Evidence](#), p 31.

⁵⁵ Ms Alison Donohoe, [Transcript of Evidence](#), p 31.

Mandatory Physical Assessments in NSW Emergency Services	
Fire & Rescue NSW	<p>Fire & Rescue NSW applies periodic assessments to all its operational members. The assessments consists of two components:</p> <p><u>Annual Fitness Drill</u></p> <p>The aim of the Fitness Drill is to support firefighters gain an annual self-benchmark of their fitness. Improved firefighter fitness enhances operational readiness, capability and safety.</p> <p><u>Periodic Health Check</u></p> <p>Health Checks are undertaken to proactively identify and address the risk of sudden incapacity in the firefighting environment. They are undertaken periodically according to an age-based schedule and include baseline health questionnaire, ECG, pathology testing and consultation with a medical practitioner nominated by the firefighter.</p> <p>This baseline information is overseen by an Independent Occupational Physician (IOP), with further referral/ assessment initiated as required. The IOP provides a Fitness For Duty certification to the firefighter and FRNSW at the completion of the Health Check.</p>
NSW Police Force	<p>Outside of General Duties, the NSW Police Force have a number of specialist roles which require mandatory physical standards that is required at the pre-employment and ongoing level. Roles in the Aviation Support Branch, Bicycle Unit, Marine Area Command, Public Order Riot Squad and Tactical Operations Unit require police officers to 'possess a high level of fitness' as a minimum requirement.⁵⁶</p>
NSW Rural Fire Service	<p>For specialist roles in the NSW Rural Fire Service, a mandatory physical assessment is a requirement for pre-employment and also conducted annually. Physical assessments have been designed to test the strength, endurance and/or performance of members to best replicate the impact and forces on the body relevant to operational requirements. Members are provided with a training guide so that preparation for a physical assessment is structured in a methodical way to build physical capacity in a manner that minimises risk of injury.</p>
NSW State Emergency Services	<p>A number of specialist operational roles within the NSW SES require a 'fit-for-task' assessment to determine the suitability of a member for a role. These include Land Search Operations, Flood Rescue Operators and Boat Operators and Vertical Rescue. See paragraph 2.22 for more details. Workers in these roles are required to 'maintain a high level of physical fitness' and are tested on a periodic basis to confirm their fitness levels. For all assessments, these are recorded to their work profile.</p>

- 2.32 We note that the current regular mandatory physical assessments, as mentioned above, are useful in establishing the physical demands and requirements in these specialist roles. From this issue, we are particularly interested in understanding how ongoing medical health assessments can assist all police and emergency service work in maintaining or improving their physical health. We will discuss this in more detail in Chapter 3.
- 2.33 Although we understand that some witnesses were concerned about the impact of introducing a mandatory standard, the Government has not called for such in its submissions.
- 2.34 The Police Association of NSW stressed that physical fitness is only one element of policing. They told us that police officers require high levels of skills and

⁵⁶ NSW Police Force & Charles Sturt University, 'NSW Police Recruitment', [Specialist Roles](#), NSW Government, webpage, accessed on 16 July 2021.

aptitude in areas other than physical fitness, such as communication skills, decision-making, de-escalation skills and time management. For example, in potentially violent situations, it is highly preferable that police officers have the communication skills to de-escalate a situation, rather than rely on physical fitness to engage in a violent situation when it occurs.⁵⁷

2.35 Dr Kate Linklater, Research Officer, Police Association of NSW, further elaborated that imposing mandatory physical standards on police is likely to have detrimental effects on the policing workforce as a whole as it can exclude people that may have other valuable skills sets. She emphasised that

if we have mandatory fitness standards placed on [women, older people or people with disabilities], we are actually creating more exclusion instead of inclusion within our workplaces.⁵⁸

2.36 We also heard concerns that a mandatory fitness standard may be used as a culling method and is discriminatory based on age and/or sex.⁵⁹ We understand that physical standards should be aimed at ensuring workers can perform their work safely, and not as a 'culling tool or mechanism for early retirement'.⁶⁰

2.37 The Public Service Association of NSW emphasised that while they have no objection to the imposition of physical fitness standards for workers it should be based on a 'genuine need for the standard to be imposed'. They suggest that mandatory standards should be tailored to each individual role and not set as an agency blanket standard and that employers should help their employees to meet this standard.⁶¹

2.38 We note these concerns and agree that if mandatory standards are introduced for police and emergency service workers, they need to be tailored for the specific requirements of the role.

⁵⁷ [Submission 3](#), Police Association of NSW, p 4.

⁵⁸ Dr Kate Linklater, Research Officer, Police Association of NSW, [Transcript of Evidence](#), 10 May 2021, p 11.

⁵⁹ [Submission 3](#), Police Association of NSW; [Submission 4](#), Public Service Association of NSW and Community and Public Sector Union NSW, p 4.

⁶⁰ [Submission 4](#), Public Service Association of NSW and Community and Public Sector Union NSW, p 4.

⁶¹ [Submission 4](#), Public Service Association of NSW and Community and Public Sector Union NSW, p 4.

Chapter Three – Workforce management of police and emergency service workers

Health and fitness programs currently in practice for police and emergency service workers

Summary

The NSW Government provides a range of policies and programs intended to promote the health and fitness of police and emergency service workers. Periodic health checks are an example of an initiative that can support the overall health and wellbeing of workers.

Finding 6:

Ongoing health checks are a useful tool in supporting the physical health of police and emergency service workers.

Recommendation 4

That the Government consider introducing a periodic health check to support police and NSW Ambulance workers' physical and mental health.

Recommendation 5

That the Government consider a more targeted evaluation of each program to identify how the programs can deliver better outcomes for their workers.

- 3.1 NSW Government agencies already have a range of policies and programs intended to promote the health and fitness of police and emergency service workers.⁶² These initiatives are comprehensive, include access to health coaching and assessments, injury prevention specialists, and fitness facilities.
- 3.2 Many inquiry participants told us that there are benefits to improving physical health and fitness. The Police Association of NSW explained that any strategy that would 'increase the opportunities for police officers to participate in additional exercise is likely to produce a benefit to both officers and NSW Police Force'.⁶³
- 3.3 Both the Health Services Union and Police Association of NSW told us that they are generally supportive of the current programs that are offered to their employees.⁶⁴
- 3.4 The Police Association of NSW also told us that there should be more targeted evaluations of each program to identify how the programs can deliver better outcomes for their workers.⁶⁵ We support this view and recommend that the

⁶² See [Submission 5](#), NSW Government.

⁶³ [Submission 3](#), Police Association of NSW, p 2.

⁶⁴ [Submission 1](#), Health Services Union, p 6; [Submission 3](#), Police Association of NSW, p 6.

⁶⁵ Mr Angus Skinner, Research Manager, Police Association of NSW, [Transcript of evidence](#), 10 May 2021, p 9.

Government consider a review for each specific program to assess its effectiveness rather than a high level policy review.

- 3.5 We were also pleased to learn that police and emergency service government agencies offer voluntary health assessments to their employees. We consider that implementing a mandatory periodic medical assessment for police and emergency service officers may be a useful tool to support workers' physical and mental health. Unlike a mandatory physical standard, a medical assessment takes a holistic approach to check on the overall physical and mental wellbeing of a police officer and emergency service worker.
- 3.6 We found that Fire & Rescue NSW's mandatory periodic health check, as outlined in Chapter 2, is a good example of how such a check can assist in overall health and wellbeing of their officers.
- 3.7 The following section of the report highlights some of the main programs that the NSW Government provides for their emergency service workers.

NSW Health (NSW Ambulance)

- 3.8 The NSW Ambulance told us that they provide a health and fitness program which encourages their employees to be more aware of how lifestyle choices can have a direct impact on their overall health and wellbeing. The program covers diet, exercise, sleep and preparation for shift work.⁶⁶
- 3.9 We were also told that they provide training to mitigate the risk of injury from manual handling, which includes education on proper lifting techniques, managing fatigue, conducting dynamic risk assessments, exercises to increase strength and fitness as well as a component on violence prevention.⁶⁷
- 3.10 Paramedics who have been injured at work are managed by a recovery team whose work includes finding suitable duties for staff unable to return to their substantive duties, in addition to sourcing injury prevention equipment.

NSW Police Force

- 3.11 We heard that the NSW Police Force has a range of internal support services to assist all employees with their physical health. Assistant Commissioner Leanne McCusker, Corporate Services NSW Police Force, told us that by investing in physical health programs and initiatives for police officers, it supports police officers do their job and protect the community. During the public hearing, she emphasised that:

Policing is a safety-critical occupation and a sufficient level of physical capability is necessary to safely and effectively perform police work. The inability to perform physical aspects of police work may endanger the safety of officers and the general public.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ [Submission 5](#), NSW Government, pp 8-9 (NSW Health).

⁶⁷ [Submission 5](#), NSW Government, p 9 (NSW Health).

⁶⁸ Ms Leanne McCusker, Assistant Commissioner, Corporate Services, NSW Police Force, [Transcript of Evidence](#), 10 May 2021, p 23.

3.12 As part of the inquiry, the NSW Police Force outlined the programs and initiatives they provide to support their police officers. We were pleased to hear that these programs are delivered in collaboration with other organisations, including the Police Association of NSW.⁶⁹ The following list is a summary of NSW Police Force programs that are available for police officers to improve their physical health and fitness:

- “Your Health Check” is a voluntary health screening program involving a fifteen minute confidential health assessment, including cholesterol and blood glucose; waist measurement and blood pressure and assesses the risk of diabetes.
- “RECON” (Reconditioning, Restart, and Reconnect) provides specialist treatment and education to expedite participants’ return to work or improve their health.
- “RECONNECT” program assists officers with psychological injuries, or those at risk of injury, with individualised fitness programs, in addition to support from a psychologist. The NSW Police Force also intends to implement a new Mental Wellbeing Strategy, to link physical and mental health.
- The Physical Training Instructor Program, where certified physical training instructors who are also sworn police officers, conduct fitness assessments and provide individualised exercise programs.⁷⁰

Fire and Rescue NSW

3.13 As discussed in Chapter 2, Fire & Rescue NSW has a physical health standard for fire fighters. They also told us that a key focus for their workforce management is ‘health, safety and wellbeing of their employees’ and the implementation of their mandatory health and fitness program meets this commitment.⁷¹

3.14 Apart from their mandatory physical assessments, Fire & Rescue NSW also told us that they proactively provide assistance to their employees to raise their physical fitness standard. Ms Donohoe outlined that they have a dedicated team of health and fitness advisers, wellbeing officers, and a wellbeing coordinator who promote health and provide assistance to help their employees reach their physical fitness goals prior to an assessment or ongoing health support.⁷²

NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS)

3.15 NSW Rural Fire Service told us about their “Your Health Matters” (YHM) which is a health and wellbeing program that commenced in 2016.⁷³ The program facilitates access to medical practitioners, dieticians, exercise physiologists and other health professionals.

⁶⁹ [Submission 3](#), Police Association of NSW, p 6.

⁷⁰ [Submission 5](#), NSW Government, pp 18-20 (NSWPF); [Submission 3](#), Police Association of NSW, p 6.

⁷¹ [Submission 5](#), NSW Government, p 30 (FRNSW).

⁷² Ms Alison Donohoe, [Transcript of Evidence](#), pp 31-32.

⁷³ [Submission 5](#), NSW Government, pp 33-34 (NSW RFS).

- 3.16 The YHM program offers voluntary health checks that assess risks of cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes by considering waist circumference, blood pressure, blood glucose, cholesterol ratio, physical activity, smoking, and nutrition.⁷⁴ Where a significant health risk is identified members are referred to a medical practitioner.
- 3.17 RFS also told us about their behavioural change program (known as SafeSpine™ SafeMind) that educates workers about musculoskeletal health with the aim of prevention injuries. The program includes musculoskeletal exercises and coaching to prevent soft-tissue injuries. They added that they continually monitors reported injuries, illnesses and incidents to identify opportunities to improve the health of members.⁷⁵

NSW State Emergency Services (SES)

- 3.18 The SES described its requirements for staff to complete a health declaration and for volunteers to disclose any medical conditions that might affect their safety, in addition to its “Mental Health Strategy”⁷⁶ and but did not provide any detail about any general ongoing health programs, apart from the fit-for-task assessments for specialist roles.
- 3.19 We understand that volunteer wellbeing is referred to in the SES annual report. However, in that context the focus is on mental health and no specific reference is made to physical health.⁷⁷ We note that exercise management is mentioned as a component of capability development training, but little detail is provided to illustrate extent that this training is relevant to physical fitness.⁷⁸

Equipment

Summary

The use of equipment such as lifting equipment, CPR devices and body worn cameras can reduce the number of injuries suffered by paramedics.

Finding 7

The use of mechanical aids, such as lifting equipment and CPR devices, can reduce the number of injuries suffered by paramedics

Recommendation 6

NSW Ambulance to provide further investment in equipment that assist in manual handling, helping to prevent manual handling injuries.

- 3.20 We found that the use of mechanical aids, such as lifting equipment and CPR devices, can reduce the number of injuries suffered by paramedics. Therefore, we

⁷⁴ [Submission 5](#), NSW Government, p 36 (NSW RFS).

⁷⁵ [Submission 5](#), NSW Government, p 37 (NSW RFS); Vitality Works, [SafeSpine™ SafeMind](#), webpage, accessed on 16 July 2021.

⁷⁶ [Submission 5](#), NSW Government, p 42 (NSW SES).

⁷⁷ NSW State Emergency Service, [Annual Report 2019-20](#), NSW Government, 31 December 2020, p 19.

⁷⁸ [Annual Report 2019-20](#), p 16.

are recommending the NSW Ambulance provide further investment in equipment that assist in manual handling, helping to prevent manual handling injuries.

- 3.21 The Health Services Union told us that that the majority of injuries suffered by paramedics are caused by manual handling. To reduce the incidence of such injuries, the Health Services Union called for an increase of investment in equipment to assist in lifting and carrying patients and in performing extended CPR.⁷⁹
- 3.22 Mr Fraser, on behalf of the Health Services Union, told the us that the manual lifting of patients without modern equipment causes injuries to the backs and shoulders of paramedics. Mr Fraser also stated that paramedics received repetitive strain injuries as a result of performing CPR for extended periods of time. He explained that such injuries could be prevented by the use of mechanical CPR devices and that every ambulance should be equipped with a mechanical CPR device.⁸⁰
- 3.23 Mr Fraser also emphasised that lifting equipment and mechanical CPR devices are particularly important if a paramedic is required to operate without a partner, but it was emphasised that even where paramedics work in pairs mechanical aids can significantly reduce the number of injuries.⁸¹ We support the Health Services Union's calls for further investment in equipment to reduce paramedics risk to these injuries.

Body worn Cameras

Finding 8

Body worn cameras may assist police and emergency service workers in reducing workplace injuries, particularly in situations involving occupational violence.

- 3.24 We are interested in the use of body worn cameras (BWC) and how they can assist in the reduction of injuries to police and emergency service workers.
- 3.25 Dr Morgan told us that a trial of BWC is being conducted by NSW Ambulance. The use of BWC is intended to prevent occupational violence. If violence does occur, a video recording of the event is provided to the NSW Police Force as evidence for court proceedings. Dr Morgan confirmed that BWC are particularly useful in reducing physical injury to paramedics, acting as a deterrent to occupational violence.⁸²
- 3.26 We note that occupational violence is not within the terms of reference in this inquiry, however any tool that helps to prevent or reduce physical injury in police and emergency service work is a positive development.

⁷⁹ Mr Steve Fraser, [Transcript of evidence](#), p 2, pp 3-4.

⁸⁰ Mr Steve Fraser, [Transcript of evidence](#), pp 2-4.

⁸¹ Mr Steve Fraser, [Transcript of evidence](#), pp 3-4.

⁸² Dr Dominic Morgan, [Transcript of evidence](#), pp 26-27.

Injury management and Return to work

Summary

The Government provides support and assistance to injured workers to return to work or find suitable alternative employment. However, there is the need for an increase in the availability of suitable positions to facilitate the return to work of injured officers.

Finding 9

Paramedics are registered health professionals and can perform alternate duties while recovering.

Finding 10

NSW Police have introduced new capability frameworks in line with the rest of the NSW public sector.

Recommendation 7

That the Government should look for more opportunities to formalise return to work pathways for injured salaried emergency service workers.

- 3.27 We were pleased to learn that programs already exist to assist injured workers to return to work or to find suitable alternative employment. However, some submissions indicated that there is room for improvement in the management of injuries. We heard that there is the need for an increase in the availability of suitable positions to facilitate the return to work of injured officers.⁸³
- 3.28 We heard that injured officers are sometimes underutilised and that, in some cases, officers remain off work for extended periods because suitable duties are not available for them.⁸⁴ The Australian Society of Rehabilitation Counsellors emphasised that return to work should occur as soon as practicable, while acknowledging that the imperative to return to work should be balanced with symptom management.⁸⁵
- 3.29 The Police Association of NSW suggested a more flexible approach to each role, that does not insist on injured workers performing every task, but instead allows officers to work to their strengths and undertake those duties that they are capable of performing. This proposal enables injured officers to continue to work and ensure that the skills, knowledge and experience of officers are not wasted.⁸⁶
- 3.30 The Health Services Union raised concerns regarding injured workers who are located in regional areas, where opportunities for redeployment suitable for injured paramedics are more limited than those in metropolitan locations. The Health Services Union proposed that injured paramedics could be redeployed to

⁸³ [Submission 1](#), Health Services Union, p 6; [Submission 4](#), Public Service Association of NSW and Community and Public Sector Union NSW, p 3; pp 8-9; [Submission 3](#), Police Association of NSW, p 6.

⁸⁴ [Submission 3](#), Police Association of NSW, p 5.

⁸⁵ [Submission 2](#), The Australian Society of Rehabilitation Counsellors, p 5.

⁸⁶ [Submission 3](#), Police Association of NSW, pp 5-6.

other agencies within NSW Health, if no suitable work is available within the ambulance service.⁸⁷

- 3.31 We understand that NSW Ambulance and NSW Police Force have introduced other measures to assist their workforce in returning to work or performing alternate duties while recovering.
- 3.32 We were told that since December 2018, paramedics are now considered as a registered health profession under the national law, which has opened up opportunities for paramedics to undertake alternative roles. Dr Morgan referred to discussions with local health districts about the possibility of paramedics performing tasks that hospitals carry out on a daily basis, such as immunisation.⁸⁸
- 3.33 Assistant Commissioner McCusker told us that the NSW Police Force promotion process was changed in 2020 and is now aligned with the NSW Government's capability framework.⁸⁹ Assistant Commissioner McCusker said that officers are increasing their understanding of their capabilities, including a range of skills that can be utilised in alternative employment, such as leadership and decision making.⁹⁰
- 3.34 In addition, we learned that the NSW Police Force provides advice and assistance to police officers who choose to medically retire. This advice includes exploring their skillset so that they can be transitioned into other roles, whether within the public sector or outside. Assistant Commissioner McCusker told us that they have been considering the option of transitioning employees who can no longer perform the inherent duties of a police officer into roles usually carried out by unsworn staff.⁹¹
- 3.35 We commend NSW Ambulance and NSW Police Force for these initiatives that support their workers to return to work from injuries. We believe it would be beneficial for other emergency service agencies to have similar initiatives. Therefore, we are recommending the NSW Government to look for more opportunities to formalise return to work pathways for injured salaried emergency service workers.

⁸⁷ [Submission 1](#), Health Services Union, p 5.

⁸⁸ Dr Dominic Morgan, [Transcript of evidence](#), p 27.

⁸⁹ The NSW Public Sector Capability Framework is designed to help attract, develop and retain a responsive and capable public sector workforce. It gives the large and diverse public sector a common language to describe the capabilities and behaviours expected of employees across the public sector. Capabilities are transferable knowledge, skills and abilities relevant to a role. [See NSW Public Service Commission, 'Workforce Management', [Capability Framework](#), NSW Government, webpage, accessed on 16 July 2021.

⁹⁰ Assistant Commissioner McCusker, [Transcript of evidence](#), pp 27-28.

⁹¹ Assistant Commissioner McCusker, [Transcript of evidence](#), pp 27-28.

Appendix One – Terms of reference

That the Legislative Assembly Committee on Law and Safety inquire into and report on the physical health of police and emergency services workers in NSW, with particular reference to:

- a) How the physical health of police and emergency services workers impacts the performance of their duties
- b) What the physical entry requirements for police and emergency services workers are and identifying areas for improvement
- c) Any impacts on workplace management for police and emergency services organisations; and
- d) Any other related matters

Appendix Two – Conduct of inquiry

On 4 March 2020, the Committee resolved to conduct an inquiry into the physical health of police and emergency services workers in New South Wales. Written invitations were sent to selected stakeholders and a media release was issued calling for submissions by 30 April 2020. The date for submissions was later extended to 28 August 2020.

The Committee received five submissions. The full list of submissions appears in **Appendix Three**.

The inquiry began in March 2020. The Committee received a referral from the Minister of Police and Emergency Services to conduct another inquiry into assaults on members of the NSW Police Force and so this inquiry was placed on hold.

The inquiry recommenced on 25 March 2021 and the Committee held a public hearing in Parliament House on Monday 10 May 2021. Most of the witnesses appeared in person, while five witnesses appeared via videoconference. The hearing was broadcast live on the Parliament's website. Witnesses who provided evidence at the public hearings are listed in **Appendix Four**.

Transcripts of the public hearings, together with submissions, answers to questions on notice and additional information, are available on the inquiry's [website](#).

Appendix Three – Submissions

- 1 Health Services Union
- 2 The Australian Society of Rehabilitation Counsellors
- 3 Police Association of NSW
- 4 Public Service Association of NSW and Community and Public Sector Union NSW
- 5 NSW Government

Appendix Four – Witnesses

Monday, 10 May 2021, Macquarie Room, Parliament House, Sydney

Organisation	Witness
Health Services Union	Steve Fraser NSW Ambulance Paramedic
	Tess Oxley NSW Ambulance Paramedic
Police Association of NSW	Angus Skinner Research Manager
	Dr Kate Linklater Research Officer
The Australian Society of Rehabilitation Counsellors	Dr Boris Fedoric National President
	Bernadine Euers Chief Executive Officer
Public Service Association of NSW	Nicole Jess President
	Claire Pullen Women's Officer
NSW Police	Assistant Commissioner Leanne McCusker
NSW Ambulance	Dr Dominic Morgan Chief Executive
Fire and Rescue NSW	Alison Donohoe Director, Work Health & Safety
NSW Rural Fire Service	Peter McKechnie Deputy Commissioner, Field Operations
	Lisa Chih Director, Health and Safety

Appendix Five – Extracts from minutes

MINUTES OF MEETING 5

Wednesday 4 March 2020

1.33 pm

Room 1136

Members present

Mrs Wendy Tuckerman (Chair), Mr Mark Taylor (Deputy Chair), Ms Steph Cooke, Mr Edmond Atalla, Ms Tamara Smith

Officers in attendance

Clara Hawker, Madeleine Dowd, Abegail Turingan

The Chair opened the meeting at 1.33 pm.

1. Minutes of Meeting 5

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Smith, seconded by Mr Atalla:

That the minutes of the meeting of 20 November 2019 be confirmed.

2. Correspondence

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Taylor, seconded by Mr Atalla:

That the Committee note the correspondence received from the Hon David Elliott MP, Minister for Police and Emergency services regarding potential inquiry topics.

3. Adoption of new inquiry

The Committee discussed potential inquiry topics, and the draft terms of reference as circulated.

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Cooke, seconded by Mr Atalla:

That the Committee conduct an inquiry into the physical health of police and emergency services, in accordance with the draft terms of reference as amended.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Taylor, seconded by Ms Smith:

That the Committee call for submissions to be received by a date to be agreed, and write to listed stakeholders, as agreed to by the Committee at a later date.

The Chair noted that a media release announcing the inquiry would be issued.

4. Next Meeting

The Committee adjourned at 1.57 pm until a date and time to be determined.

MINUTES OF MEETING 7

Thursday 23 July 2020

10.00 am

Room 1254 and videoconference

Members present

Mrs Wendy Tuckerman (Chair, via videoconference), Mr Mark Taylor (Deputy Chair, in person), Ms Steph Cooke (via videoconference), Mr Edmond Atalla (videoconference)

Officers in attendance

Clara Hawker, Emma Wood, Kieran Lewis, Madeleine Dowd, Abigail Turingan, Ilana Chaffey

The Chair opened the meeting at 10.00 am.

1. Apologies

Ms Tamara Smith

2. Minutes of Meeting 6

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Taylor, seconded by Mr Atalla:
That the minutes of the meeting of 4 March 2020 be confirmed.

3. Inquiry into the physical health of police and emergency services workers

a. Correspondence

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Taylor, seconded by Ms Cooke:
That the Committee note the following correspondence:

- Email received on 26 March 2020 from ***, declining to make a submission to the inquiry into the physical health of police and emergency services workers.
- Email received on 6 April 2020 from ***, declining to make a submission to the inquiry into the physical health of police and emergency services, and providing other information.
- Email received on 9 April 2020 from ***, declining to make a submission to the inquiry into the physical health of police and emergency services, and indicating that the *** would be willing to appear as a witness at a public hearing to answer any specific health or hospital data questions the Committee may have.
- Correspondence received by the Chair on 9 April 2020 from ***, declining to make a submission.

b. Inquiry update

The Chair provided the Committee with an update regarding the progress of the current inquiry, noting that submissions close on 28 August 2020.

4. ***

5. Next meeting

The Committee adjourned at 10.15 am until a date and time to be determined.

MINUTES OF MEETING 8

Tuesday 8 September 2020

2.30 pm

Room 1254 and videoconference

Members present (all members via videoconference)

Mrs Wendy Tuckerman (Chair), Mr Mark Taylor (Deputy Chair), Ms Tamara Smith, Ms Steph Cooke, Mr Edmond Atalla

Officers in attendance

Emma Wood, Kieran Lewis, Abegail Turingan, Ilana Chaffey, Gerard Rajakariar

The Chair opened the meeting at 2.32 pm.

1. Minutes of Meeting 7

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Atalla, seconded by Mr Taylor:
That the minutes of the meeting of 23 July 2020 be confirmed.

2. ***

3. Inquiry into the physical health of emergency workers

a. Temporary hold on inquiry

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Atalla, seconded by Mr Taylor:
That the Committee place the inquiry into the physical health of emergency workers on hold until the inquiry into assaults on members of the NSW Police Force concludes.

4. Next meeting

The Committee adjourned at 2.58 pm until Monday 21 September 2020.

MINUTES OF MEETING 12

2.07 pm, Monday 16 November 2020
Room 1036 and videoconference

Members present

Mrs Wendy Tuckerman (Chair), Mr Mark Taylor (Deputy Chair) (via videoconference), Ms Tamara Smith, Ms Steph Cooke, Mr Edmond Atalla (via videoconference)

Officers in attendance

Elaine Schofield, Emma Wood, Kieran Lewis, Frances Arguelles, Ilana Chaffey

1. Confirmation of minutes

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Atalla: That the minutes of the meeting of 12 October 2020 be confirmed.

2. ***

3. General business

a. Inquiry into the physical health of police and emergency service workers in NSW

The Chair raised for discussion the timeline of the Committee's inquiry into the physical health of police and emergency service workers in NSW.

The Committee agreed that the inquiry timeline will be discussed at the next meeting of the Committee in the new year.

4. Next meeting

The meeting adjourned at 3.22 pm until a date and time to be determined.

MINUTES OF MEETING 13

1.17 pm, Thursday 25 March 2021

Room 1254

Members present

Mrs Wendy Tuckerman (Chair), Mr Mark Taylor (Deputy Chair), Ms Tamara Smith, Ms Steph Cooke, Mr Edmond Atalla

Officers in attendance

Clara Hawker, Stephanie Mulvey, Frances Arguelles, Abegail Turingan, Nicolle Gill

1. Confirmation of minutes

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Smith: That the minutes of the meeting of 16 November 2020 be confirmed.

Mr Atalla entered at 1.18 pm

Mr Taylor entered at 1.19 pm

2. Correspondence

3. Inquiry into the physical health of emergency workers

a. Publication of submissions

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Atalla, seconded by Ms Cooke: That the Committee publish submissions 1-5 in full.

b. Timeline for inquiry

The Committee discussed the timeline of the Committee and agreed to hold a half day public hearing on 10 May 2021.

4. General business

Nil.

5. Next meeting

The meeting adjourned at 1.24 pm and the Committee will next meet on 10 May 2021.

MINUTES OF MEETING 14

10 May 2021

12.35 pm

Macquarie room and Webex

Members present

Mrs Wendy Tuckerman (Chair), Mr Mark Taylor (Deputy Chair), Ms Tamara Smith, Ms Steph Cooke, Mr Edmond Atalla (WebEx)

Officers in attendance

Clara Hawker, Stephanie Mulvey, Frances Arguelles, Ilana Chaffey, Nicolle Gill

1. Deliberative meeting

a. Confirmation of minutes

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Smith: That the minutes of the meeting of 25 March 2021 be confirmed.

Ms Cooke entered at 12.39 pm.

b. Correspondence

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Taylor: That the Committee noted the correspondence.

c. Media orders

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Taylor, seconded by Ms Smith, that the Committee authorises the audio-visual recording, photography and broadcasting of the public hearing on 10 May 2021, in accordance with the Legislative Assembly's guidelines for the coverage of proceedings for parliamentary committees administered by the Legislative Assembly.

d. Answers to questions taken on notice

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Smith that witnesses be requested to return answers to questions taken on notice and supplementary questions within 14 days of the date on which the questions are forwarded to the witnesses.

2. Public hearing: Inquiry into physical health of police and emergency service workers.

Witnesses were admitted. The Chair opened the public hearing at 12.54pm and made a short opening statement.

Mr Steve Fraser, Member of the Health Services Union and a NSW Ambulance Paramedic was sworn and examined.

Ms Tess Oaxley, Member of the Health Services Union and a NSW Ambulance Paramedic was affirmed and examined.

Mr Angus Skinner, Research Manager, Police Association of NSW, (via Webex) was affirmed and examined.

Dr Kate Linklater, Police Association of NSW, was affirmed and examined.

Dr Boris Fedoric, National President, The Australian Society of Rehabilitation Counsellors, (via WebEx) was affirmed and examined.

Ms Bernadine Euers, CEO, The Australian Society of Rehabilitation Counsellors, (via WebEx) was affirmed and examined.

Ms Nicole Jess, President, Public Service Association, (via WebEx) was affirmed and examined.

Ms Claire Pullen, Women's Officer, Public Service Association, (via WebEx) was affirmed and examined.

Assistant Commissioner Leanne McCusker APM, NSW Police Force, was sworn and examined.

Dr Dominic Morgan, Chief Executive, NSW Ambulance, was sworn and examined.

Ms Alison Donohoe, Director, Work Health and Safety, Fire and Rescue NSW was affirmed and examined.

Deputy Commissioner Peter McKechnie, Field Operations, Rural Fire Service, was affirmed and examined.

Ms Lisa Chih, Director Health and Safety, Rural Fire Service, was affirmed and examined.

The public hearing concluded at 4.32 pm.

3. Deliberative meeting

The Committee commenced a short deliberative meeting at 4.32 pm

e. Publication orders

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Taylor: That the corrected transcript of public evidence given today be authorised for publication and uploaded on the Committee's website.

4. General business

Nil.

5. Next meeting

The meeting adjourned at 4.34 pm until a date and time to be determined.

UNCONFIRMED MINUTES OF MEETING 15

1.17 pm, Wednesday 4 August 2021

Webex

Members present

Mrs Wendy Tuckerman (Chair), Mr Mark Taylor (Deputy Chair), Ms Tamara Smith, Mr Edmond Atalla

Officers in attendance

Clara Hawker, Frances Arguelles, Inez Ryan, Abegail Turingan, Nicolle Gill

Apologies

Ms Cooke was an apology.

1. Recording of proceedings

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Taylor, seconded by Mr Atalla: That the committee agree to recording the meeting for the purposes of the secretariat preparing the minutes and that the recording be deleted when the minutes are settled.

2. Confirmation of minutes

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Smith, seconded by Mr Atalla: That the minutes of the meeting of 10 May 2021 be confirmed.

3. Correspondence

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Taylor, seconded by Ms Smith: That the Committee noted the correspondence.

4. Inquiry into physical health of police and emergency service workers in NSW

a. Responses to questions taken on notice

The Committee considered the publication of the following responses received:

- Australian Society of Rehabilitation Counsellors
- Police Association of NSW
- Public Service Association of NSW
- NSW Police Force
- NSW Rural Fire Services
- Fire & Rescue NSW

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Taylor, seconded by Mr Atalla: That the Committee authorises publication of the above mentioned responses to questions taken on notice at the hearing on the Committee's website.

b. Consideration of Chair's draft report

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Atalla, seconded by Mr Taylor: That Committee consider the report in globo and by exception.

Resolved, on the motion of Tamara Smith: that report be amended to insert another sentence at the end of paragraph 1.9 with the updated statistics provided by the NSW Police Force in response to their questions on notice regarding the percentage of the workforce that is on workers compensation.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Atalla, seconded by Mr Taylor: That the Committee adopts the draft report (as amended), and that it be signed by the Chair and presented to the House.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Atalla, seconded by Mr Taylor: That Committee authorises the secretariat to make appropriate final editing and stylistic changes, as required.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Atalla, seconded by Mr Taylor: That, once tabled, the report be published on the Committee's website.

5. General business

There was no general business.

6. Next meeting

The meeting adjourned at 1.30 pm until a date and time to be determined.