

Supplementary questions

NSW Police Association

Question 1

The committee has received a suggestion for localised ‘wellness services’, where staff of various emergency services agencies can access early supports to assist them to deal with the trauma arising from their work in a non-stigmatised, neutral setting. What are your views on this suggestion?

It is not clear from the information provided exactly what these proposed “localised ‘wellness services’” would be, how they would be delivered, or whether they would be in addition to current services or replace them. Therefore the Police Association is not in a position to give a definitive answer.

With the information available, we can state the following:

The NSWPF has developed and delivered a number of support services which are likely similar to what is proposed in the supplementary question. Those are described in more detail in our original submission, but would include programs such as:

- Incident support services and the incident support database,
- The Reconnect, Restart, and Reconditioning programs,
- Your Health Check,
- E-Wellcheck,
- Chaplaincy,
- The Employee Assistance Program, and
- Peer Support Officers.

The Police Association made recommendations in our submission that these programs be accessible to all officers in the NSW Police Force who need them.

The Police Association also recommended additional services which should be available to all officers in the NSW Police Force. Most importantly, the Police Association recommended all police officers have access to face-to-face counselling, delivered independent of any injury claims process and on an early intervention model. Through our regular consultation, we understand the NSW Police Force plans for current and future wellbeing programs is consistent with the recommendations made in our submission.

In the Police Association’s opinion, more benefit would be delivered to police officers in NSW if the Committee made a recommendation to fund that service, than the option proposed in the supplementary question.

Regarding whether the service should be delivered jointly to various emergency services agencies, the Police Association is on balance not supportive of the proposal at this time.

PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 4 – LEGAL AFFAIRS
INQUIRY INTO EMERGENCY SERVICES AGENCIES

Each agency has developed suites of wellbeing programs which encompass those proposed in the supplementary question. Each agency has hopefully tailored those programs to meet the specific and unique needs of its workforce and their families.

We can only speak for our members and not those of other agencies, but we maintain the NSW Police Force has an excellent range of programs and services tailored to meet the welfare needs of police officers and their families. This has been confirmed by external review. Some further improvements are needed, covered by our recommendations, particularly in Section 3 of our submission.

Many of the services and programs currently being developed and delivered by the agencies involved are relatively new. More time is needed to assess the effect they have on injury and recovery rates before programs are selected and amalgamated for a joint service model.

The Police Association therefore believes that at this point in time, a move to joint service delivery by these agencies represents a risk that this would result in a 'one size fits all' service which would no longer be tailored to the unique needs of those workers, and would result in a decrease in the quality of programs available to members of each agency. That may change in the future, but right now the Police Association would not support a move to a joint delivery model.

The provision of some services might benefit from economies of scale in joint delivery. If combining services enabled them to be accessible in more locations, by increasing demand and therefore enabling more service hubs, this is something the Police Association would of course consider.

However, the Police Association would only support that model if it did not have any detrimental effect of the level of service either currently provided to police officers, or services which are soon to be delivered to police officers through upcoming programs or those recommended in our submission. Any services jointly delivered should also not detract from the tailored services currently provided, and funding for joint services would have to be at least equivalent to existing funding arrangements, or provided in addition to current funding.

Currently, the NSW Police Force Workforce Improvement Program receives short term funding, not recurrent funding. This makes long term planning and partnerships with external organisations difficult, due to the precarious financial position of the WIP. The current WIP funding runs out at the conclusion of the next financial year. If that funding is allowed to expire, that would effectively mean a drastic reduction in the capacity of the NSW Police Force to develop and deliver new wellbeing programs.

The Police Association has identified a need for WIP funding of \$40 million over the next term of Government, as well as adoption of its successful programs as business-as-usual activities for the NSW Police Force. This funding will allow the WIP to expand the delivery of its successful programs to more officers, provide access to counselling services on an early-intervention, no claim model, and continue to develop and assess new programs. The Police Association also identified a need for 2500 more police officers over the next 5 years to address unsustainable workloads and stress levels.

The Police Association believes at this time, it represents a far greater benefit to emergency service workers for funding to be made available to their specific agencies existing and planned efforts, such as those in the WIP, and the equivalents for other agencies.