



# Peer Support Program Policy

Version 1  
07/12/2017

## Peer Support Program Policy

### Key points

- Peers provide a variety of interpersonal helping behaviors assumed by non-professionals who undertake a helping role with others.
- Peers are utilized in a variety of ways responsive to the situation or circumstance they are responding to throughout the New South Wales State Emergency Service and local communities,
- The type of roles carried out by peers include; Providing an empathetic listening ear, assistance to explore coping strategies and/or act as a conduit to longer-term support when required. Peers are trained to provide psychological first aid, manage immediate threats to life or safety, provide information about understanding the impacts of challenging events, maintaining mental fitness, coping with stress and building resilience
- Peers can also be deployed to operational environments to provide on-scene support and psychological first aid. Psychological first aid is an approach to helping people affected by an emergency, disaster or traumatic event.
- The Peer Support Program also provides a series of intentional interventions when required based on the foundations of Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM), which is a comprehensive, integrated, systematic, and multi-component crisis intervention program. CISM provides an overarching approach that covers education and awareness, on-scene support, recovery and referral
- The peer support program relies on a core team of trained peer support duty officers who provide cover for the 24 hour 7 days 1800626800 support line, and the guidance of the program coordinator and clinical psychologist. The program works closely with (and trains with) the NSW SES Chaplaincy program.

### Expected understanding of this policy

Audience	Level of understanding required		
	Detailed	Key points	Awareness
Region Controller	●		
Local Controller	●		
Unit Controller	●		
Unit Member		●	
Peer Member	●		
All other members			●

## Peer Support Program Policy

### Summary

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The following procedures provide a standardised and easy to understand process for managing the membership status of Peer Support members.

These procedures apply to all members, and supports the Critical Incident Counselling Service Policy

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## 1. Purpose

NSW SES is committed to ensuring that members have access to comprehensive mental health support services. As a first responder agency, members face unique challenges in managing a complex risk profile. They can be impacted by common workplace risk and protective factors, but they may also experience highly challenging environments and exposure to potentially traumatic events. One of the ways NSW SES mitigates these risks is by providing members with a 24 hr/7 day Peer Support Program and access to a network of Peers across the Service.

The purpose of this policy is to identify the principles which underpin ethical practice and service delivery for the NSW SES Peer Support Program. It provides members with information and guidance to inform decision-making about the role of Peer Support in NSW SES.

## 2. Scope and application

This policy applies to all NSW SES members when interacting with the Peer Support Program. Other areas of work that relate to mental health and wellbeing are out of the scope of this policy.

## 3. Procedures

### 3.1 Policy principles for Peer Support

The NSW SES Peer Support Program provides members and their families with someone they can talk to someone who can empathise with their experiences as a member of an emergency service and link them to longer-term support if required. The NSW SES Peer Support Program recognises that sometimes individuals need to speak to someone confidentially to assist them to resolve any personal concerns in a private way.

### 3.2 Primary purpose of Peer Support

Peer support is defined as a variety of interpersonal supports, provided by non-professionals who undertake a helping role with others. Peers are trained to:

- Provide an empathetic listening ear, explore coping strategies and act as a conduit to longer-term support when required
- Provide psychological first aid (a recognised methodology in emotional support programs)
- Manage immediate threats to life or safety
- Provide information to aid individuals to understand challenging events, maintaining mental fitness, coping with stress and building resilience

Peers can also be deployed to operational environments to provide on-scene support and psychological first aid. Psychological first aid is an approach to helping people affected by an emergency, disaster or traumatic event. It includes basic principles of support to promote natural recovery. This involves helping people to feel safe, connected to others, calm and hopeful, access physical, emotional and social support, and feel able to help themselves.

The Peer Support Program also provides a series of intentional interventions when required based on the foundations of Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM), this is a comprehensive, integrated, systematic, and multi-component crisis intervention program. CISM provides an overarching approach that covers education and awareness, on-scene support, recovery and referral.

#### **4. Access to the Peer Support Program**

All members of NSW SES and their immediate families are able to contact the Peer Support Program 24 hours a day, seven days a week on 1800 626 800. This service is delivered by Peer Support Duty Officers who are able to triage requests for support by members. Responses can be provided by the network of services available including the Peer Support and Chaplaincy Teams, and directly to the NSW SES Psychologist. Through this service members can receive immediate one-on-one support and referrals to longer-term support; discuss options for education and awareness sessions; discuss options for critical incident support; and be referred to the Coordinator Critical Incident and Counselling Services and/or the NSW SES Psychologist.

#### **5. Governance**

NSW SES Peers adhere to the NSW SES Code of Conduct and to the *NSW SES Peer Support Code of Conduct*, as well as all NSW SES Policies and Procedures. NSW SES Peers are not mandatory reporters based on the requirements specified in the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 No 157*.

#### **6. Safety Issues and Imminent Risks**

Peers are in a unique position to provide emotional and psychological support and link members with longer-term support when required. Such a role necessarily means that Peers may be in contact with members in times of extreme distress, who may disclose sensitive information, and who may indicate potential safety risks to either themselves or others. These safety risks may concern, but are not limited to suicidality, child abuse, domestic and family violence, non-suicidal self-injury or other crimes/emergencies.

NSW SES acknowledges and respects the right of all members and their families to privacy and confidentiality. However, NSW SES is also committed to the protection of life and the safety of those who contact the Peer Support Program. Where, in the course of providing Peer Support, Peers believe there is the threat of imminent and significant harm to self or others, Peers must call Triple Zero (000) as soon as possible. Peers also call 1800 626 800 as soon as possible and report the incident to the Peer Support Duty Officer who will then notify the Coordinator Critical Incident and Counselling Services and/or the Manager Safety, Health and Wellbeing and/or the NSW SES Psychologist.

Refer to *Peer Support Procedure* for further information.

## **7. Reporting Lines**

Peers report to their usual management structure in their role as a NSW SES volunteer or employee. They have a direct reporting line to the Coordinator Critical Incident and Counselling Services in their role as a Peer. Peers can be stood down from their role as a Peer at any time with the approval of their direct supervisor and the Manager Safety Health and Wellbeing and the Coordinator Critical Incident and Counselling Services.

## **8 Privacy and Confidentiality**

Peers respect and maintain the privacy and confidentiality of all contacts made in their role. Information may be shared with the necessary authorities in cases of threat or imminent threat of significant harm to self or others.

Where in the course of providing Peer Support, Peers believe there is the threat of imminent and significant harm to self or others, Peers must call Triple Zero (000) as soon as possible. Peers also call 1800 626 800 as soon as possible and report the incident to the Peer Support Duty Officer who will then notify the Coordinator Critical Incident and Counselling Services and/or the Manager Safety, Health and Wellbeing and/or the NSW SES Psychologist.

Peers report on all contacts made in their role using only de-identified information. Peers can request consent from contacts to provide their details to a third-party for follow-up and/or referral. Contacts can chose whether to provide this consent to Peers.

## 9. Peer Support Training and Accreditation

Peers are appointed for a two-year period and are required to reconfirm their commitment and maintain their skills to be an active member of the team. To maintain currency in their role Peers must complete Peer Support Training and Psychological First Aid. They must also attend at least 2 professional development activities each year. Peers are also able to participate in exercises to maintain currency in their role.

All NSW SES members are able to express interest in becoming a Peer. Recruitment is conducted on a needs basis and selection is based on assessment of the member's expression of interest and completion of training including roleplay assessment.

Refer to the *Peer Support Expression of Interest* for further information.

For NSW SES volunteers, the time commitment for Peer Support training is entirely voluntary and requires approval and endorsement from Unit/Local Controller and Region Controller.

NSW SES employees are able to participate in Peer Support training and be a member of the Peer Support team. Time spent in Peer Support training during normal business hours Monday to Friday can be counted toward ordinary working hours with approval from Business Unit Line Managers.

Any disputes regarding the amount of time employees conduct Peer Support should be discussed with the Manager Safety Health and Wellbeing and/or the Coordinator Critical Incident and Counselling Services. Employees who are Peers are not able to claim overtime for attendance at Peer Support training or any other activities conducted as a Peer that do not fall within their ordinary working hours.

### 9.1 Critical Incident Support Training and Accreditation

Peers are able to undertake further training to provide critical incident support when there is a need to recruit to those roles. Selection of Peers to provide critical incident support is based on assessment by the Coordinator Critical Incident and Counselling Services and the NSW SES Psychologist, and will include a review of the activities the peer has undertaken since being in the program.

Refer to the *Critical Incident Support Role Description* for further information.



## 9.2 Peer Support Duty Officer Training and Accreditation

Peers are able to undertake further training to be Peer Support Duty Officers (Duty Officers). Recruitment to these roles will occur when vacancies exist. Selection of Peers to be Duty Officers is based on assessment by the Coordinator Critical Incident and Counselling Services and the NSW SES Psychologist.

Refer to the *Peer Support Duty Officer Role Description* for further information.

### 10. Complaints Handling

All NSW SES members can make a complaint about Peer Support services using the NSW SES policies and procedures for grievances and complaints handling. Members can also contact any of the following to discuss their complaint:

- Coordinator Critical Incident and Counselling Services
- Manager Safety, Health and Wellbeing
- NSW SES Psychologist

### 11. Supervision of Peers

Peers are required to participate in clinical supervision to maintain accreditation in their role. Clinical supervision is provided by the NSW SES Psychologist or other clinical psychologist as approved by the Manager Safety Health and Wellbeing and the Coordinator Critical Incident and Counselling Services. Peers are required to participate in clinical supervision at least twice a year and be able to self-activate to seek clinical supervision as required.

### 12. Peer Support activities

#### 12.1 Peer Support and Psychological First Aid

Peers provide one-on-one support (both face-to-face and by phone) and psychological first aid. Peers do not require approval or activation for these activities. Peers provide short-term support and referrals to longer term support when the contact requires ongoing assistance. Refer to Appendix A for Suggested Referrals

### 13. Education and Awareness Sessions

Peers provide education and awareness-raising sessions to local units on a biannual basis, to provide understanding about the impacts of challenging events, maintaining mental fitness, coping with stress and building resilience. (*My5 is an example of these sessions.*)

## 14. Operational Deployments

Peers participate in operational deployments by providing Psychological First Aid and on-scene support. Peers must meet all fit-for-task requirements to participate in operational deployments.

When participating in an operational response, Peers report to the Incident Controller responsible for the relevant area of operation. They also report to the Coordinator, Peer Support Program and the Manager, Safety Health and Wellbeing for all logistical requirements and maintaining access to clinical support throughout deployments.

Incident Controllers may task Peers in operational environments to conduct one-on-one sessions both face-to-face and over the phone and provide Psychological First Aid and on-scene support. They may also utilise the services of Peers as required to provide information about the impacts of challenging events, maintaining mental fitness, coping with stress and building resilience. Peers may not be assigned to other unrelated administrative or operational duties without approval of the Coordinator Critical Incident and Counselling Services and/or the Manager Safety Health and Wellbeing.

Refer to the *Peer and Chaplain Operational Response Procedure* for further information.

### 14.1 Interstate or International Deployment

Peers deployed interstate or internationally remain subject to NSW SES Policies and Procedures. All actual or perceived conflict arising with local host agency or national policy or procedure shall be referred to the Manager Safety Health and Wellbeing.

## 15. Critical Incident Support

The Peer Support Program also trains members to provide a series of intentional interventions when required based on the foundations of Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM), which is a comprehensive, integrated, systematic, and multi-component crisis intervention program. CISM provides an overarching approach that covers education and awareness, on-scene support, recovery and referral.

Peers are able to participate in training to learn how to provide Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) Interventions. Based on successful completion of this training, Peers can be activated to provide CISM interventions operationally and non-operationally.

Refer to the *Critical Incident Support Role Description* and the *Critical Incident Support Procedure* for further information.

## 16. Peer Support Duty Officers

All members of NSW SES and their immediate families are able to contact the Peer Support Program 24 hours a day, seven days a week on 1800 626 800. This service is manned by Peer Support Duty Officers who are able to triage support for members throughout the network of services available including the Peer Support and Chaplaincy Teams, and directly to the NSW SES Psychologist. Through this service members can receive immediate one-on-one support and referrals to longer-term support; discuss options for education and awareness sessions; discuss options for critical incident support; and be referred to the Coordinator Critical Incident and Counselling Services and/or the NSW SES Psychologist.

Refer to the *Peer Support Duty Officer Procedure* for further information.

## 17. Reporting Requirements

All Peers report on all contacts and activities conducted as a Peer using the *Peer and Chaplain Activity Tracker*. Refer to the *Peer Support Procedure* for further information.

Peers involved in the provision of critical incident support use the *Critical Incident Support Report*. Refer to the *Critical Incident Support Procedure* for further information.

Peer Support Duty Officers utilise *Duty Officer Job Cards* to report on their fortnightly shifts. Refer to the *Peer Support Duty Officer Procedure* for further information.

## 18. Evaluation of Peer Support Program

The Peer Support Program is evaluated through the education and awareness program evaluation sheets, as well as by direct feedback to the Coordinator Critical Incident and Counselling Services and the Manager Safety Health and Wellbeing. All members can also provide feedback about the program through their usual chain of command.

## 19. Financial reimbursement for Peer Support activities

All members of the NSW SES Peer Support Program are reimbursed for travel costs associated with approved activations and deployments as a Peer. Refer to the *Peer Support Procedure*.

## 20. Roles and responsibilities

### **NSW SES Commissioner**

- Ensure that this policy is implemented throughout the NSW SES
- Provide leadership about understanding the impacts of challenging events, maintaining mental fitness, coping with stress and building resilience
- Promote the benefits the Peer Support Program

### **NSW SES Assistant Commissioners/Directors**

- Ensure this policy is implemented within their teams
- Provide leadership about understanding the impacts of challenging events, maintaining mental fitness, coping with stress and building resilience
- Ensure leadership teams promote the benefits of the Peer Support Program
- Ensure their teams understand and are able to access the services provided by the Peer Support Program
- Ensure all members of their teams participate in education and awareness programs to promote mental fitness bi-annually

### **Region/Local/Unit Controllers and Managers**

- Ensure this policy is implemented within their teams
- Provide leadership about understanding the impacts of challenging events, maintaining mental fitness, coping with stress and building resilience
- Ensure they promote the benefits of the Peer Support Program
- Ensure their teams understand and are able to access the services provided by the Peer Support Program
- Ensure all members of their teams participate in education and awareness programs to promote mental fitness bi-annually

### **Manager, Safety Health and Wellbeing**

- Ensure this policy maintained in accordance with NSW SES Policy and Procedures

### **Coordinator, Critical Incident and Counselling Services**

- Maintain this policy in accordance with current practice
- Ensure members of the NSW SES Peer Support Team are provided with this policy prior to taking on a role as a Peer
- Ensure all members are provided with opportunities to participate in education and awareness programs that promote mental fitness

### **All NSW SES Members**

All NSW SES members have a duty of care to:

- Take reasonable care of themselves and others in NSW SES in relation to their own mental health and wellbeing
- Utilise the services of the Peer Support Program as required to reinforce mental fitness and protective factors and reduce risk factors

## 21. Related documents

Related internal documents:

- NSW SES Code of Conduct and Ethics
- NSW SES Values (TARPS)
- NSW SES Misconduct, Unsatisfactory Performance and Serious Offences Policy and Procedures
- Peer Support Code of Conduct
- Peer Support Expression of Interest
- Peer Support Role Description
- Critical Incident Support Role Description
- Peer Support Duty Officer Role Description
- Peer Support Procedure
- Critical Incident Support Procedure
- Peer Support Duty Officer Procedure
- Peer and Chaplain Operational Response
- Peer Support Activity Reporting Procedure
- Peer Support Financial Reimbursement Procedure
- NSW SES Chaplaincy Policy

Related legislation:

- Work Health and Safety Act 2011
- Work Health and Safety Regulation 2011

## 22. Support and advice

You can get advice and support about anything in this policy from:

- the Policy Owner – Manager, Safety Health and Wellbeing – [whs@ses.nsw.gov.au](mailto:whs@ses.nsw.gov.au)
- the Policy Sponsor – Director, People & Culture
- the Policy Author – Coordinator, Critical Incident and Counselling Services

## 23. Definitions

In this policy, the term:

Term	Definition
<b>Must/required/shall</b>	Indicates a mandatory action required that must be complied with.
<b>Should</b>	Indicates a recommended action that should be followed unless there are sound reasons for taking an alternative course of action.
<b>May</b>	Indicates there are other acceptable options of similar or equal application.

Document	Purpose
<b><i>NSW State Emergency Services Act 1989</i></b>	An Act of the NSW Parliament that establishes the State Emergency Service, defines its functions, and grants power to the Commissioner and other members to do various things.
<b><i>Code of Conduct and Ethics</i></b>	Sets out the principles Members are required to uphold, and prescribe specific conduct in areas central to the exercise of NSW SES's functions.
<b><i>Volunteer Membership Policy</i></b>	Sets out the policy principles under which the NSW SES will recruit, retain and manage the membership status of NSW SES volunteers during their tenure with the Service.

## 24. Document control sheet

Title	Peer Support Program Policy
Current Version #	Version 0.1
Document Approval Status	Draft
Directorate	People & Culture
Branch/Region/Unit/	Critical Incident and Counselling Services
Policy Owner	Manager, Safety Health and Wellbeing
Policy Sponsor	Director, People & Culture
Classification	
Effective date	21/2/2018
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Rescinds	Critical Incident Support Program Policy
Key Words	Peer Support; Critical Incident Support

### *Version History*

Version #	Creation date	Author	Summary of changes
1.0	14/12/2017	Thomas Alexander	Replacing previous policy

### *Approvals*

Name	Title	Date	Version signed off
Gary Zuiderwyk	Policy Owner		1.0
Kathleen Iacurto	Policy Sponsor		1.0
Mark Smethurst	Commissioner	21/2/18	1.0