

Media Release

The Hon Daniel Andrews MP
Premier



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BETTER MENTAL HEALTH CARE FOR OUR EMERGENCY WORKERS

Emergency workers will be able to access mental health support the moment they need it, with the introduction of provisional acceptance payments for mental health injuries under a re-elected Andrews Labor Government.

The massive changes to our WorkCover system will be informed through a twelve-month pilot ahead of an expanded rollout, with a re-elected Labor Government to introduce legislation for provisional acceptance payments for mental health claims to every Victorian worker within two years.

Recognising that the heavy toll of trauma can manifest in many ways – from PTSD to panic disorders to anxiety – this reform will cover any mental injury sustained by our paramedics, police, Protective Services Officers (PSOs), firefighters and SES workers in the course of duty.

And because the costs associated with these injuries – including appointments, medication and even hospitalisation – can add up, under Labor’s plan there will be no monetary cap.

Additionally, Labor will create a new Centre of Excellence for Emergency Worker Mental Health to make sure Victoria’s emergency workers get the very best support and services.

The Centre, the first of its kind in Victoria, will be established alongside founding partner Beyond Blue, and will be dedicated to making sure our health professionals have the skills they need to provide support for emergency workers, including undertaking ground-breaking research.

In protecting our state, first responders are exposed to trauma every single day, with emergency workers including paramedics, police and firefighters six times more likely to suffer serious and debilitating mental illness.

But right now, these workers have to wait for their WorkCover claim to be assessed before they can access financial support to cover the cost of medical expenses.

And unlike physical injuries, which can be more straightforward to diagnose, mental health injuries are often complex and take longer to assess, leaving workers without access to funded medical services.

That’s why Labor will make sure our emergency workers have their treatment paid for the moment they submit a claim.

As part of the initial twelve-month pilot for emergency workers, further work will be done to examine ways the WorkCover system can be improved for workers suffering from mental illness and consultation on options to widen the pilot to potentially include other workers such as nurses, child protection staff, corrections and youth justice officers, and forest firefighters will be undertaken before the end of 2018.

Labor will also invest \$6 million to create a Specialist Network of Clinicians, helping to put our emergency workers in touch with expert health professionals even sooner. Additional funding will also be provided for emergency workers to access specialist mental health services.

A further \$6 million will go towards an Early Intervention and Prevention Fund to help Victoria Police create and expand on-the-ground mental health support for its staff.

While the previous Liberal Government went to war with our paramedics and failed to recruit a single new police officer, only Labor will back our dedicated emergency workers and make sure they get the support they need.

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Quotes attributable to Premier Daniel Andrews

"Our first responders can witness and experience the most unimaginable trauma."

"Sometimes these kinds of injuries can go untreated for years, even decades. It means, when our emergency workers do put their hand up for help, we need to be there."

Quote attributable to Minister for Police Lisa Neville

"These reforms and the new Centre of Excellence will make sure the mental health of police and PSOs is first and foremost."

Quote attributable to Minister for Health Jill Hennessy

"Our paramedics are on the frontline caring for the people we love. But right now, when it comes to making sure they get that same care themselves, too many are left struggling."

Quote attributable to Minister for Finance Robin Scott

"This is a landmark reform to the WorkCover system that will make sure workers suffering from mental injuries can get fast access to the treatment they need."