POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH IN YOUNG ADULT FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICE PERSONNEL

KEY FINDINGS FACT SHEET - Leadership Perspectives

Leadership perspectives were provided through twelve one-on-one semi-structured interviews with senior leadership personnel, along with one focus group comprising unit leaders and brigade captains. All states and territories were represented.

Management of psychosocial risks and hazards

Ongoing monitoring of psychosocial risks and hazards was a priority, with a focus on operations. These are often handled with a reactive (rather than proactive) approach.

Workplace culture was identified as a risk/hazard in some agencies.

Some agencies engaged in proactive approaches, e.g. providing additional support in targeted areas with increased exposure.

That's definitely something we're looking into in regard to looking at the risks. We definitely probably have more of a focus on health and safety risks rather than the psychosocial.

Leadership Perspective

Mental health priority

Mental health was a stated high priority with visible advocacy from senior staff, in all agencies interviewed.

There's still that stigma that's attached to mental health. You can put as many ads online. It comes down to actual education and caring for those that are having mental health episodes.

Leadership Perspective

Different needs of young adults was noted, and identified as a support gap.

Mental health messaging was not always reflected in the broader workplace culture, or protocols.

Existing support programs

Leaders indicated that impacts were minimised through debriefing and peer support. They perceived that these supports were highly utilised and valued by young volunteers.

Promoting positive mental health through education was seen as valuable, as were preventative approaches. These were identified as gaps.

Leaders identified that mental health support was provided primarily through peer support and the Employee Assistance Program.

Leadership Perspective

The informal ones are the ones where people will actually open up because in a lot of cases people are able to actually normalise the thoughts and feelings.

Perceived effectiveness of support

One of the strengths that we have is that social support. When you all get together on a Sunday morning and you clean down the truck and you talk about, you know, the fire that you went to the previous Wednesday, that's incredibly helpful.

Leadership Perspective

Most agencies indicated that support access and perceived effectiveness of support was not formally monitored.

Agency staff reported higher uptake of mental health supports for younger vs older volunteers. This was seen to be resulting from reduced stigma in younger volunteers.

All agencies discussed the value of informal support with peers, identifying this as the primary support mechanism.