



# POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH IN YOUNG ADULT FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICE PERSONNEL

## KEY FINDINGS FACT SHEET - Young Volunteer (YV) Perspectives

Perspectives on mental health and available supports were sought from young adult fire and emergency service personnel through a series of focus groups. Five focus groups were conducted with a total of twenty young adult volunteers participating. All states and territories were represented.

**Mental health is seen as important**

Young volunteers (YVs) said it was easier to identify when their peers were struggling and needed support, than it was to recognise their own mental health care needs.

*Mental health is getting better these days, but to a lot of older people mental health doesn't exist. You just need to suck it up. You just need to deal with it.*

*Volunteer Perspective*

YV noticed differences in the way younger and older volunteers approach mental health and support needs. YV are more open, but stigma remains.

Presence of stigma was identified, and the importance of supporting each other and keeping mental health conversations open.

**Role and being part of the community**

*Volunteer Perspective*

*The reasons why I wanted to become a [emergency services volunteer] is to help my community and help my people when they need help.*

Contributing to their community whether urban, regional, rural, or remote, informed young volunteers self-image, and was a key incentive to join.

Young volunteers felt they were an integral part of an essential service, and in regional and remote units, young volunteers often took on leadership roles.

A protective factor for the volunteer's mental health is the sense of enjoyment and purpose in what they do.

**Perspectives on Support**

Young volunteers indicated that informal debriefing was seen as highly valuable, and readily accessible.

Debriefing was seen to be valuable and a positive way to process incidents, and young volunteers noted a sense of familiarity and safety in sharing with peers who were there.

*I think I enjoy informal debriefing better and it's often with the people that were at the job with you because then you don't have to re-explain what happened.*

*Volunteer Perspective*

Most YV noted the psychological load of supporting others, and moderated when, to whom, and how much distress was shared, to minimise perceived burden.

**Training and commitment**

Young volunteers introduced through family/friends have a sense of the role and the incidents they will face. There is some understanding of the mental challenges involved.

Young volunteers balance multiple roles (e.g. study, work). This can create conflicts given they also have a high level of personal commitment to their volunteering role.

*Volunteer Perspective*

*I come from a family that's always volunteered with [agency]. Coming from a rural setting, everybody has to pull their weight, sort of thing. Like we desperately need volunteers.*



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