Answering the Call

Mental Health and Wellbeing in the Police and Emergency Services Sector

David Lawrence, Wavne Rikkers, Michael Kyron
beyondblue Police and Emergency Services Program
Objectives

• Reduce the stigma associated with mental health conditions, attempted suicide and suicide
• Increase the number of personnel taking action to manage their mental health
• Increase the capability of agencies to create and maintain mentally healthy workplaces
• Increase public awareness of the unique and challenging role fulfilled by police and emergency services personnel
**Phase 1**

**What?**
Personal stories of police and emergency services personnel and their family members

**Why?**
To provide an opportunity for individuals to tell their story and to inform Phases 2 & 3

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**Phase 2**

**What?**
National survey of police and emergency services personnel in Australia

**Why?**
To build a comprehensive picture of mental health conditions, stigma & help-seeking behaviours, risk & protective factors

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**Phase 3**

**What?**
Agency-by-agency engagement, consultation with other key stakeholders

**Why?**
To translate the findings from Phases 1 & 2 into practical strategies to achieve change
Answering the call
National Mental Health and Wellbeing Study of Police and Emergency Services

Supported by a funding contribution from the Bushfire and Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre
Advisory Group

• Chaired by Key Lay AO APM, Chairman of Ambulance Victoria and former Commissioner of Victoria Police
• Membership includes:
  – Executive leaders from agencies & executive level union leaders
  – Academics & clinicians with specialist expertise
  – Representatives of individual personnel and family members
  – Representatives of community support groups
• Technical advisory group oversaw questionnaire development
Aim and Key research questions

The aim of the national survey was to establish a comprehensive understanding of the mental health and wellbeing of both current and former police and emergency services personnel. The survey addressed the following research questions:

• What is the prevalence of mental wellbeing, common mental health conditions, suicidality and associated substance use among Police and Emergency Services personnel?
• What sub-groups are at higher or lower risk?
• What are the individual and organisational risk and protective factors?
• What factors influence help-seeking?
What we know about mental health in Police and Emergency Services

• ANAO report – Managing Mental Health in the Australian Federal Police
• University of Adelaide – SA Metropolitan Fire Service Health and Wellbeing Study
• When Helping Hurts: PTSD in first responders
• Senate inquiry – the high rate of mental health conditions experienced by first responders, emergency service workers and volunteers
• Rescuers at risk (2012): worldwide pooled prevalence of PTSD: 10%
Survey methodology

• Scope: current employees, volunteers and former employees from all Ambulance, Fire and Rescue, Police and SES agencies across Australia
• Stratified random sampling from employee/volunteer lists – aiming to survey 14,000 current employees, 6,000 volunteers and 1,200 former employees
• Online administration of survey with hardcopy forms available on request
• Questionnaire length ~ 20-25 minutes
Questionnaire content

- Wellbeing (SWEMWBS), Psychological distress (K10), PTSD, diagnosed conditions
- Impact on functioning
- Suicidal thoughts and behaviours
- Individual and organisational risk and protective factors
- Attitudinal and behavioural factors
- Resilience
- Social support
- Physical health
- Alcohol and drug use
Questionnaire content

- Impact of experiencing stressful events in the workplace
- Working hours, shift work, impact on family
- Workplace and team culture
- Bullying
- Experience of stigma and discrimination
- Use of support services and programs
- Experiences with workers’ compensation
- Barriers to seeking support
- Workplace programs and practices
Response rates and representativeness

• 33 of 36 agencies participated
• Over 21,000 individuals participated in the survey
  – Employees: 14,868 participating (22% response rate)
  – Volunteers: 5,485 participating (10% response rate)
  – Former employees: 661 participating
Responses achieved

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Employees</th>
<th>Volunteers</th>
<th>Former employees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ambulance</td>
<td>3,473</td>
<td>559</td>
<td>346</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire &amp; rescue</td>
<td>2,975</td>
<td>2,626</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police</td>
<td>8,088</td>
<td>2,300</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SES</td>
<td>332</td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>14,868</strong></td>
<td><strong>5,485</strong></td>
<td><strong>661</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Representativeness of the sample

• Survey responses were compared with:
  – Census data by occupation and industry
  – Data from report on Government Services
  – Workforce demographic characteristics provided by agencies
• Survey data comparable with census figures by:
  – Marital status, educational attainment, country of birth, Indigenous status
• Slightly higher proportions of females, non-operational staff and older employees in the employee sample
• More active volunteers
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# Representativeness of the sample

## Proportion of female respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Survey</th>
<th>Census</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Police</td>
<td>38.8</td>
<td>34.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire &amp; rescue</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>20.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambulance</td>
<td>47.9</td>
<td>43.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SES</td>
<td>54.2</td>
<td>50.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Emerging research themes
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• Poor workplace practices and culture can be as damaging to mental health and wellbeing as occupational trauma.
• The need to educate people and support them to get help when they need it.
• The dangers of organisational and personal stigma.
Organisational practices and culture

- Workplaces that are supportive and inclusive, have regular discussions about workplace experiences and more effectively manage emotional demands on staff have lower rates of mental health issues.
Mental health literacy

- Some people experiencing high levels of distress did not recognise that they have a mental health issue or did not seek help.
- Recognising the signs and symptoms of emerging mental health issues, knowing when to seek support, and how to do so, are important to getting the support you need.
Stigma

- Most personnel have a positive regard for, and are supportive of colleagues experiencing mental health conditions
- However, self-stigma – fear of what others may think or an inability to talk openly about personal feelings and circumstances – remains common
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Next steps

- Survey findings to be released end of November 2018
- Each participating agency to be provided with an agency-specific report
- Phase 3 knowledge translation strategy – 2019
- Confidentialised Unit Record File
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Thank you