

EXECUTIVE MINUTE

on

**JOINT COMMITTEE OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND
AUDIT REPORT No.475**

**Defence First Principles Review, Naval Construction and Mental Health in
the AFP**

Given the time that has lapsed since the making of these recommendations in 2019, the AFP has made significant progress on mental health initiatives, policies and processes and some of the budget-related recommendations are no longer current.

The responses provided below refer to the current state of maturity relating to mental health in the AFP which has been accelerated as a result of the 2020 federal budget commitment of \$65m to implement the new AFP health model known as SHIELD. SHIELD services in each Regional Command provide access to a dedicated team of clinicians and health professionals who understand the unique nature of the AFP's work and has an emphasis on prevention and early intervention.

Response to the recommendations

Recommendation No. 7

The Committee recommends that the Australian Federal Police report back to the Committee to outline progress on the implementation of recommendations from all reviews undertaken since 2015 that are relevant to AFP's management of employee mental health, including, but not limited to, ANAO Report No. 31 (2017-18), the Phoenix Review, the Culture Change Review and the Draft 2017 AFP Mental Health Review.

Summary of response: Agreed with qualification

Supporting Rationale:

The AFP takes the mental health of employees seriously and has undertaken significant transformation since 2015.

The AFP has implemented several health and wellbeing initiatives to support our employees through a focus on education, prevention and early intervention. This includes implementation of the AFP's health model, known as SHIELD, which sets the foundation for a strong safety culture in the AFP.

Another initiative includes the 'Road to Mental Readiness' training which is available to all AFP staff. This is an education-based program designed to address and promote mental health and reduce the stigma of mental health in a first responder setting. The course seeks to reduce barriers and encourage early access to care, as well as improve short-term performance and achieve long-term mental health outcomes.

In relation to the reviews mentioned the AFP is able to report the following:

ANAO Report No. 31

The Australian Federal Police (AFP) welcomed the work undertaken by the Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) via the *Auditor-General Report (No. 31 of 2017-18) Managing Mental Health in the AFP* which was tabled on 7 March 2018. The report contained six recommendations. The AFP accepted all recommendations and have since fully implemented five of these as at June 2024. The sixth recommendation, relating to the digitisation of employee health records, is an ongoing body of work complicated by contractual issues. The AFP is committed to seeing this recommendation through with implementation of the Organisational Health Solution expected to be completed by March 2026.

On 28 June 2018, your Committee commenced several new inquiries based on ANAO reports, including the Auditor-General Report No. 31 of 2017-18 (Managing Mental Health in the AFP). In August 2018, the AFP provided a written submission to the Committee and appeared at a public hearing.

The Phoenix Review

The Australian Federal Police (AFP) engaged Phoenix Australia Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health (Phoenix Australia) to undertake a Structural Review, Reform and Policy Development on Mental Health of the AFP. The AFP sought this review in the context of mental health being identified as a key priority within the AFP.

The Phoenix Review contained a total of 37 recommendations (across ten principles) all of which were incorporated into the AFP Health and Wellbeing Strategy released in 2018. A new health and wellbeing strategy is in the

OFFICIAL

advanced stages of development and will continue to build on these principles. The new strategy will look beyond baseline regulatory compliance and focus on the deliberate, iterative and sustainable improvement in AFP's commitment to the health and wellbeing of our workforce. The new strategy will continue the focus on the complex interplay of physical, psychological, organisational and social health and its impact on members' health and wellbeing, and operational capability.

The Culture Change Review

The six principles and recommendations of the 2016 Cultural Change Report have shaped and informed a number of AFP governance instruments and processes. The recommendations of the 2016 Cultural Change Report are enforced through the operation of the AFP Commissioner's Order on professional standards (CO2).

Recommendations from the 2016 Cultural Change Report, in conjunction with an Internal Audit on Bullying and Harassment, have informed the development and early implementation of a new Integrated Complaints Management Model (ICMM). Associated governance including the AFP National Guideline on bullying, harassment and discrimination has been developed and implemented. The AFP have also introduced a single entry point for staff seeking to raise workplace issues and complaints. The intent of this being to reduced complexity and confusion, enhanced proactive communication, timeliness in issue resolution and greater transparency and consistency in decision making.

The 2016 Cultural Change Report critically informed the AFP establishing Safe Place and reshaping the AFP's Confidant Network capabilities. These functions have since merged into a single Confidant Network and Safe Reporting team. This provides a means for AFP appointees to confidentially fulfil mandatory reporting obligations under CO2 and report harmful, unethical or inappropriate workplace behaviour.

The AFP has also established a partnership with the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) to further promulgate enterprise-wide cultural change. The AFP has committed to a further 5-year partnership on this with the AHRC. Additionally, to accelerate the implementation of Respect@Work the AFP has established a Respect@Work Taskforce. This taskforce is comprised of SES and Executive Level members across the AFP to drive action to create safer, more respectful and inclusive AFP workplaces consistent with the principles of the Cultural Change Report.

The 2016 Cultural Change Report informed the development of the AFP's Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2023-26 including respective diversity action plans.

Finally, the principles of the Cultural Change Report also helped to shape the 2018-2023 AFP Health and Wellbeing Strategy, particularly its consideration of

OFFICIAL

OFFICIAL

Organisational Health as a pillar of focus. The findings from the Cultural Change Report have influenced and informed the development of the new Health and Wellbeing Strategy – Beyond 2024 with a continued focus on the importance of strong and effective leadership in supporting good mental health.

The Draft 2017 AFP Mental Health Review

Similar to the various reviews and audits referenced above, the content of the draft mental health review was integral into the development of the AFP Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2018-2023. The draft 2017 AFP Mental Health Review was internally developed and informed the Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2018-2023 which has a deliberate focus on the interplay between physical, psychological, social and organisational pillars of health.

Senate Standing Committee on Education and Employment References Committee in February 2019

The AFP also participated in the Senate Standing Committee on Education and Employment References Committee in February 2019. The Committee was focused on first responders more broadly and the AFP was an active participant. The recommendations from the Committee included elements such as legislative reform, training, education and enhancing service and support offerings for first responders. The AFP consider there to be considerable overlap with similar recommendations provided in the Phoenix and ANAO recommendations and submit that significant progress has been made internally against the intent of these recommendations. The AFP have also worked collaboratively with Department of Employment and Workplace Relations on the development of the Fair Work Amendment (Closing Loopholes) Bill 2023 which included an amendment to the *Safety Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 1988*, to introduce a rebuttable presumption that post-traumatic stress disorder injuries experienced by first responders, including AFP employees, were contributed to, to a significant degree, by their employment. The amended legislation received royal assent on 14 December and the provisions active from 15 December 2023.

The AFP continue to critically assess the maturity of our service offerings in consideration of the high risk and demanding work that our workforce endures. This is evidenced by the comprehensive approach that involved academia, domestic and international benchmarking in addition to internal focus groups to develop the new AFP health service delivery model known as SHIELD, noting it is a service delivery model subject to continuous improvement.

OFFICIAL

Recommendation No. 8

The Committee recommends that the Australian Federal Police report back to the Committee in August 2019 on:

- an update of the overall budget situation for the AFP taking account of the 2018-19 MYEFO and the 2019-20 Budget decisions and forward estimates;
- the number of mental health professionals employed by the AFP as at 30 June, for each year from 2016 to 2019;
- the staffing ratios of mental health professionals to AFP employees, against each of the years as above; and
- the allocation of mental health resources to identified mental health needs.

Summary of response: Agreed with qualification

Supporting Rationale:

The AFP is dedicated to ensuring that all members feel supported and safe. In relation to the AFPs budget situation and mental health resourcing the AFP is able to report the following:

AFP Budget Situation

The AFP's total resources for 2019-20 was \$1,562 million, \$19 million higher than in 2018-19. This funding includes \$797.2m of additional funding provided the government subsequent to the 2018-19 Budget for:

- \$468.5m for National Security Agencies — additional resourcing
- \$130.9m for the Whole-of-Government Drug Strategy;
- \$112.0m For PNG Post APEC 2018 Policing Partnership with Papua New Guinea.
- \$33.0m to manage the funding pressures in 2018-19
- \$14.1m for the rectification of drug contamination of state offices
- \$12.1m for the Pacific Faculty of Policing at the Australian Institute of Police Management.
- \$9.9m to Strengthening Counter Fraud Arrangements;
- \$6.7m for Countering Foreign Interference;
- \$3.2m for Regional Processing Arrangements – Christmas Island.
- \$3.2m for Use of Force Training for the Royal PNG Constabulary
- \$2.2m Enhancing the Criminal Intelligence Capability
- \$1.5m for the Development of a Police Health Model

OFFICIAL

Mental Health Professional Staffing and Resourcing

As cited in the Phoenix report published in January 2018, at that point in time, the AFP had nine full time equivalent mental health practitioners, all based in Canberra, to support an organisational headcount of 6510. This equated to a ratio of one mental health clinician for every 723 members (1:723) which fell outside the national benchmark of approximately 1:250 staff. The AFP has worked hard to attract and retain mental health practitioners to enable the organisation to meet, and now consistently, exceed that benchmark which is evidenced by the following data:

Financial Year	Number of Mental Health Professionals	Ratio of Mental Health Professionals to AFP employees
30 June 2017	9	1:708
30 June 2018	9	1:711
30 June 2019	15	1:444
30 June 2020	21	1:360
30 June 2021	32	1:224
30 June 2022	35	1:213
30 June 2023	40	1:196
30 June 2024	40	1:202

Mental health practitioners are strategically located across regional and functional commands based on identified needs and risk profile. The collective mental health capability works to deliver psycho-education and training, psychological clearance assessments for staff entering high risk roles and periodic mental health reviews following deployments.

Mental Health Clinicians in the AFP provide accessible and risk-focused prevention and early intervention services to members and work areas to help minimise and manage health risks and maximise operational impact.

Mental Health clinicians provide services primarily across three domains:

1. Mental health response (Respond)
 - Clinical Intervention
 - Short term interventions; stabilization while awaiting external referrals
 - Case Management

OFFICIAL

- Assessment and triage
 - Supporting members to access internal and external referrals
2. Performance sustainment (Prevent/Protect)
 - Pre-employment and pre-deployment along with advice to Command
 3. Performance enhancement (Enhance)
 - Operationally focused team engagements
 - Leadership skills training and Resilience training.

Recommendation No. 9

The Committee recommends that the Australian Federal Police report back to the Committee on its progress towards improving governance arrangements for employee mental health at the organisational level.

Summary of response: Agreed with qualification

Supporting Rationale:

The AFP has made progress towards improving the governance arrangements for employee mental health at the organisational level since the report was published. This is evidenced by:

- The release of the AFP Health and Wellbeing Strategy in May 2018, noting that a revised Health and Wellbeing Strategy – Beyond 2024 is in the advanced stages of development;
- The development and implementation of a holistic health governance framework that remains subject to continuous improvement;
- Providing data and insights related to mental health to key AFP governance committees on a regular basis to drive awareness, engagement and deliberate action to address any emerging trends; and
- Implementation of a Health Education Framework which provides information on educational opportunities provided by the AFP to enable our people to develop the behaviours, skills and knowledge across their career lifecycle to make healthy choices and together foster healthy workplaces and a positive culture.

In addition to the above, the AFP has governance instruments related to mental health issues including:

- The Commissioner's Order on operational safety (CO3) which requires the adoption of communication strategies for dealing with individuals with a mental illness.
- The AFP Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2023-26, which outlines inclusion principles and focuses on psychosocial safety in the workplace.

OFFICIAL

- AFP National Guideline on Work, Health, Safety and rehabilitation Management arrangements which facilitates the continuous improvement of health, safety and wellbeing, including for those with mental health matters in the AFP.
- AFP Better Practice Guide on persons suffering from mental illness or mental disorder.
- AFP Better Practice Guide on Reasonable Adjustment for People with a Disability, Illness or Injury which provides internal guidance and support resources.

The health education framework includes the delivery of 'Road to Mental Readiness' training which is available to all AFP staff. This is an education-based program designed to address and promote mental health and reduce the stigma of mental health in a first responder setting. The course seeks to reduce barriers and encourage early access to care, as well as improve short-term performance and achieve long-term mental health outcomes.

Recommendation No. 10

The Committee recommends that the Australian Federal Police:

- report back to the Committee on the outcomes of the informal pilot project on identifying the exposure of AFP employees to traumatic events;
- in implementing Recommendation No. 4 of the ANAO audit;
- consider developing formal processes to monitor and report on the AFP employee exposure to traumatic events and exposure to explicit material; and
- strengthen formal processes to monitor and provide assurance that employees, before moving into specialist roles, have appropriate psychological clearances.

Summary of response: Agreed with qualification

Supporting Rationale:

The AFP is dedicated to ensuring that appropriate measures are taken to ensure the safety of our members and have taken a holistic approach to all elements of this recommendation.

Recommendation No. 4 of the ANAO report

The AFP has introduced a range of treatments and controls to mitigate the risks associated with duties in high-risk areas which includes employees exposed to traumatic events. These include:

OFFICIAL

OFFICIAL

- Psychological clearance assessments to ensure staff entering these work areas are psychologically suitable for the roles;
- Graduated exposure exercises to help prepare members for the work they will be performing and to practice effective coping skills ahead of commencement;
- Periodic mental health reviews of staff working in these areas by AFP mental health clinicians where alerts/reminders are automated through the AFP Corporate System;
- The provision of psycho-education and training to staff working in these areas;
- The introduction of environmental controls such as breakout areas, signage and viewing rooms;
- Leadership engagement to support effective team dynamics and increase psychosocial safety between members;
- Debriefing processes following critical events and deployments;
- The support of role transition and reintegration (into and out of) high risk roles; and
- The timely provision of care coordination and clinical treatments when required by members adversely affected by professional duties.

In April 2017, the AFP implemented the Managing the Psychological Health Impact of Exposure to Explicit Material Handbook (The Handbook) to help manage the potential psychological health impacts of exposure to explicit material. This Handbook sets out AFP policy and protocol for identifying risks and implementing mitigation strategies, to manage potential psychological and health impacts for staff dealing with explicit material. The Handbook includes:

- Potential psychological risks and impacts on individuals working with explicit material;
- The responsibilities of the organisation, supervisors and individuals in promoting a safe work environment; and
- The support model which is the framework for managing appointee's recruitment into these roles, along with processes to mitigate risk and create a safe workplace.

It was identified through the evaluation process that the Pilot Project on Traumatic events proved to be ineffective largely due to technological challenges. It is anticipated that functionality to track cumulative trauma will be enabled with the pending implementation of a health management system (Organisation Health Solution) that, once implemented will interface with existing AFP systems and provide:

- One Health Record – a central repository for a broad set of information relating to AFP People's health information; and

OFFICIAL


OFFICIAL

- A Case Management Solution – streamlining planning, communications and management tool to support improved operational readiness and improved health outcomes for AFP people.
- Implementation of the Organisational Health Solution is expected to be complete by March 2026.

The AFP also have a current project underway dedicated to developing the AFP's ability to support the psychological health of members relating to operational trauma. This project will develop an enterprise wide strategy for monitoring and mitigating the risk of operational trauma.

I trust this information is of assistance and thank the Committee for its ongoing interest in addressing the mental health and wellbeing of AFP members.

Signed by



Reece P Kershaw APM

Commissioner of the AFP

OFFICIAL