

# Media Release

The Hon Daniel Andrews MP  
Premier



Thursday, 4 March 2021

## EMERGENCY WORKERS AT THE HEART OF MENTAL HEALTH RESPONSE

Emergency service workers will receive better support and more accessible mental health services as part of the Andrews Labor Government's response to the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System.

Changes to emergency services will play a key role in the Labor Government's work to overhaul Victoria's mental health system and implement the Royal Commission's recommendations.

This includes changes to responding to 000 calls, with our ambulance services to become first responders to calls for mental health support.

A special working group will be established in coming weeks with Victoria Police, Ambulance Victoria, ESTA and their industrial representatives to work through how this change will be implemented.

Premier Daniel Andrews outlined the key changes today while announcing a new \$6 million Centre of Excellence for emergency service workers – a dedicated facility to provide better mental health support services for these workers and volunteers, including those who have retired.

Delivered in partnership with a specialist network of clinicians, the Centre will build greater understanding of the unique mental health needs of emergency service workers – ensuring health professionals have the advanced skills and tools they need to support these employees.

This will include providing evidence-based treatment, as well as undertaking ground-breaking research and evaluation projects.

Emergency workers will be able to access the Centre by referral from their GP or other health professionals.

A free advisory service will also be available for health professionals who are caring for emergency service workers and who may require general advice and case management support.

Victoria's first responders and emergency service workers – including paramedics, police, firefighters and search and rescue workers – are more likely than others in the community to suffer serious and debilitating mental illness as a result of the trauma they often face while working.

According to Beyond Blue, as much as 11 per cent of an emergency service worker workforce is experiencing post traumatic stress disorder – compared to 4 per cent of adults in the general population across Australia.

The Centre will be delivered by Victorian-based organisation Phoenix Australia, which supports the Australian National Centre of Excellence in Post-traumatic Mental Health and boasts expertise in education and training as well as an internationally recognised research program.

**Quotes attributable to Premier Daniel Andrews**

*“This is about looking after the people who look after all of us. By investing in their health and wellbeing, we're making Victoria stronger for the future.”*

*“Our emergency service workers and volunteers deal with incredibly challenging situations every day – it’s critical they receive the right support to manage the pressures of their job, including the hidden effects it can have.”*

**Quote attributable to Acting Minister for Police and Emergency Services Danny Pearson**

*“Our \$6 million investment towards the new Centre of Excellence will ensure our emergency service workers and volunteers get the help they need to continue serving the community.”*

**Quote attributable to Minister for Mental Health James Merlino**

*“Our emergency services will play a critical role as we get on with rebuilding our mental health system and it’s only right we give them the support they deserve.”*