

Media Release

Jaclyn Symes MLC

Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Attorney-General

Minister for Emergency Services



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LARGEST EVER BOOST TO EMERGENCY CALL-TAKER WORKFORCE

Victoria's frontline emergency call-taker workforce will get another massive boost to tackle unprecedented demand on its services, driven by the pandemic.

Minister for Emergency Services Jaclyn Symes today announced a \$115.6 million package to bring on more call-takers, better support and manage the workforce and deliver recruitment and community education campaigns.

This funding will deliver an extra 120 new ongoing positions. This comes on top of the 43 new workers funded in the *Victorian Budget 2021/22* – who have now all been recruited and are taking calls.

It also builds on an extra \$27.5 million allocated in October for ESTA to address call-taking demand pressures and implement and scale-up technology solutions.

A comprehensive recruitment campaign is already underway to fill the new positions – which includes more than 50 in ambulance call-taking and dispatch – to build a bigger workforce to draw on during peak demand times, to train other call-takers and to better lead, support and manage teams.

All of the new positions will progressively come online by mid-2023.

This extra capacity will mean a more consistent and stable number of call-takers rostered on each day, and more workers to draw on for overtime and extra shifts to meet higher call volumes.

It will also enable a new supervision structure to better support call-takers in this highly complex environment, improve call answer speeds and ensure patient safety remains paramount.

Funding will also be provided for ESTA to start work establishing a dedicated Contemporary Learning Centre with specialist, off-shift training resources to ensure ESTA can rapidly onboard new team members in the future.

The Centre will train and mentor the hundreds of communication specialists required over the coming years and equip them with a Certificate II or Certificate III in Emergency Communications. This investment means training will be delivered without the need to take experienced call-takers offline.

Like other parts of the health system across Australia, ESTA is facing unprecedented strain from the effects of the pandemic. Ambulance calls averaged nearly 4000 calls a day during the peak of the Delta and Omicron wave in December 2021 and January 2022 – the busiest period in ESTA's history – and remain at historically high levels.

This level of calls for help has outstripped the projected demand for 2021-22, by as much as 30 per cent at the height of the Omicron wave.

This demand reflects the overall general pressure on Victoria's health system including the impact of people delaying getting medical help, an increase in the use of Triple Zero for non-emergency situations and patient transport, and an increase of COVID-19 cases needing an ambulance.

The Government has also commissioned an independent review into ESTA's capability and services, led by former Victorian Chief Commissioner of Police Graham Ashton AM, to provide longer-term reforms to support our frontline call-takers into the future.

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Quotes attributable to Minister for Emergency Services Jaclyn Symes

“We’re supporting our hard-working call-takers with more workers to ease the load, as well as systems to rapidly onboard more staff to manage future surges as quickly as possible.”

“It’s plain to see just how much pressure Omicron has put on our health system, and I know this has been a difficult time for Victorians who’ve faced distressing delays getting through to Triple Zero.”

“ESTA’s call-takers have done an incredible job throughout the past two years but it’s clear they need more support. Building on a funding boost last year, this additional investment will help further relieve the pressure on call-takers, reduce delays and provide the service that Victorians should expect.”