

MB:TR-jh
ACTU D. No 138/2018

20 June, 2018

Committee Secretary
Senate Education and Employment Committees
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Via Email: eec.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Secretary,

Re: The role of Commonwealth, state and territory Governments in addressing the high rates of mental health conditions experienced by first responders, emergency service workers and volunteers

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the Committee in relation to the above matter.

The ACTU refers the Committee to the detailed and comprehensive submissions made by our affiliates and which deal with the various matters raised by the terms of reference for this inquiry. In particular we wish to highlight the following matters arising from the submissions:

1. There needs to be careful consideration given in relation to any process of mandatory reporting to ensure that such processes do not act as a deterrent or disincentive to first responders seeking appropriate assistance. Any reporting requirements must ensure that privacy and confidentiality are properly maintained at all times to avoid any potential disadvantage to the person involved.
2. The case management processes for first responders with mental health conditions needs to be less legalistic and more sensitive to the situation of those involved to ensure that the process itself does not add to existing trauma and exacerbate any pre-existing condition.
3. The importance of returning to work after a work related injury needs to be emphasized. Return to work programmes need to be flexible taking into account the nature of the injury which has been experienced.
4. There needs to be adequate support programmes for all workers experiencing work-related mental health conditions, including for those who retire or leave work as a result of such conditions. There needs to be appropriate and adequate peer support programmes for first responder workers.
5. Government funding for specialised mental health support and treatment services tailored to the specific needs of first responder workers needs to be allocated and maintained at appropriate levels.
6. Consideration should be given to allowing notification to a worker's HSR where this is consented to by the worker involved to provide an additional level of social support for workers experiencing work-related mental health conditions.

We look forward to the Committee's consideration of the issues raised by this inquiry and for positive recommendations which might address the unique circumstances faced by first responder workers who play such a vitally important role in our society in dealing with emergency/crisis situations.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michael Borowick', written in a cursive style.

Michael Borowick
Assistant Secretary