



Joint AWU/DELWP WorkWell Project

Project Overview

In 2020 the AWU successfully applied for a WorkWell grant to identify work related risk factors that contribute to psychological injury, and with DELWP and in consultation with firefighters:

- design interventions to eliminate or reduce risk factors,
- implement the interventions, and
- evaluate and monitor the implemented interventions.

To help us identify the psychological risk factors faced by frontline firefighters within DELWP we asked RMIT researchers to survey a group of volunteers to find out what you think the risk factors are and, in 2020 twenty five firefighters were surveyed in depth twice to identify workplace stressors, those psychological hazards that lead to mental injury.

Purpose of the Project

The main project requirement is that we 'facilitate a participatory process to design, implement and evaluate preventative mental health initiatives for frontline firefighters'.

How are we doing this?

We are working with DELWP to develop 2 interventions (actions) that will tackle systems and processes within the department that create psychological hazards. We now have good evidence from RMIT about what causes workplace stress and create a psychological risk for firefighters. We want to intervene before those risks lead to injury.





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First Intervention

On 5 July a pilot program began to support firefighters who have or are likely to experience a medical downgrade during your work-life cycle which will reduce your ability to continue in your emergency role. This intervention will not look at the medical downgrade process but will evaluate how firefighters can be supported as a result of a medical downgrade.

Through the Frontline Firefighters Reference group, which met for the first time on 22/7, we are sought input into the design of a first intervention from frontline firefighters. We also have a report from RMIT that shows the risks confronting firefighters when they go through the process of a medical downgrade.

The pilot program will include the following elements:

- role/skill mapping
- career planning
- a dedicated coach
- referral to existing supports, eg. EAP Career Assist, family support

We have over 20 volunteers for this program.

Second Intervention

In the interviews conducted by RMIT in 2020 a range of workplace stressors were identified around lack of access to training and lack of resources. We want to take a closer look at why these difficulties arise and the impact on firefighters. What we are aiming for with a small pilot is to show how career development for firefighters, with defined career paths, can reduce the stress around training. This means taking a different approach to training and seeing it as ongoing.





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Defining what needs to be in place for firefighters to build a broad skills base that provides more options if you are downgraded or wish to work in other roles or parts of DELWP or other organisations is the aim of the project. Most of DELWPs frontline firefighters are long term employees so considering training and development needs over a lifetime makes sense.

At the moment we are working on a proposal with DELWP. Once we have an agreed intervention we will take it to the Frontline Firefighters Reference Group. You are the focus of this project, the AWU is committed to delivering the best possible outcomes on behalf of firefighters but we can only do this if you are participating and if your representatives on the Reference Group are bringing your views to the table and taking information about the project back to you.

