



WORKWELL PROJECT UPDATE

1. Frontline Firefighters Reference Group

A number of you are members of the Reference Group, we met for the second time on Thursday 25 August.

Our first meeting was well attended and provided an opportunity to give updates about the Project and a progress report on the first intervention (see below). Michelle Turner from RMIT talked about the evaluation framework she and her colleagues are developing.

RMIT has been an important partner in this Project. They have been involved since the planning stage, some of you were interviewed by James Harley back in 2020/21 about your perceptions of your workplace experience. These interviews have provided a foundation for us to work with so that we can effectively address the psychological hazards present in your workplaces. In May we asked James to do some more interviews with those of you who had undergone a medical downgrade. These interviews confirmed what you have told us over the years; the process is difficult, confusing and people feel unsupported. We can't address all of those issues in the Project, particularly the decision making process that leads to a medical downgrade, but with your help we can let DELWP know that the report reveals a number of ongoing psychological risks for employees.

At the second meeting Kristin Barton, Senior Consultant with Right Management, reported on the work she, Graeme Isaacs and Peter Jenkins are doing with volunteers who are part of the medical transition and support program.





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James will be back conducting interviews September through to November with those of you who are participating in the Medical Transition and Support Program, as it is implemented. James' job is to evaluate the program and how well it addresses the workplace stressors identified in his May report.

Unfortunately, due to Covid, both Reference Group meetings have been virtual. Virtual meetings with a large group make it difficult for people to have their voices heard. Peter Cantarella of DELWP has devised a small survey for members of the Reference Group to gauge how many of you want to meet in person. For those of you who are members of the Reference Group respond to Peter's survey and also make sure you bring your views and questions with you to the meetings. It is harder to get a conversation going when we are meeting in front of a computer and your input is essential if the Project is to succeed.

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2. Medical Transition and Support Program

Kristin, Graeme and Peter are now on the road talking with the participants in the Medical Transition and Support Program. The Program started last week and will take 13 weeks. Over this time participants will be undertaking skills mapping and receiving one on one coaching from the Right Management Coaches to help to create confidence and build skills and an optimistic approach to new opportunities if, and when, you are confronted with a medical downgrade. The individualised approach offered by Right Management will address some of the issues identified by RMIT and we are hopeful that DELWP will see the value of this pilot and build it in to ongoing support for firefighters who are no longer classified as fit for arduous duties.





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3. The Second Intervention

We have finalised a second intervention that has been approved by both WorkWell and DELWP. This intervention will link to the first and will be a pilot program to investigate training opportunities for firefighters across the whole of your career. The RMIT interviews revealed that lack of access to training, lack of resources, inconsistencies across districts and regions and lack of accreditation are all factors that interfere with skills development for firefighters. We also know that there is a focus on the skills you need in your current roles but, with some exceptions, not much attention paid to the skills you need to compete internally for other positions within DELWP. There is also no recognition that, at some point in your employment with DELWP, you will be medically downgraded, either temporarily or permanently and building on your existing skills and knowledge will help with the transition to an alternative career.

Recognising this and building a career framework that prepares you for alternative employment will help to soften the blow of a medical downgrade and the consequences. It is also a first step to formally acknowledging that what you learn on the job can be applied to other employment opportunities.

What we want to achieve with the second intervention is to understand how training decisions are made and their impact on the ground. We plan to involve 2 districts to get a picture of what you, your supervisors and managers see as the problems, then work from the top down to find out how decisions are made and implemented that affect training.





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This way we can identify the gaps, create a framework for career development and address some of the issues that emerged from the RMIT interviews.

This intervention is exploratory and, due to our limited timeframe, won't lead to an implementation plan. What it will do is provide valuable information to DELWP and members about how to improve the relationships between decisions made and implemented, and the impact on firefighters.

4. Another Round of Regional Visits

Expect to see either Percy Pillai or Deirdre Chance out and about from late September to mid October. We are keen to hear from you about how the Reference Group is working and, now the Medical Transition and Support Program is underway, what you think it offers those of you who have experienced or anticipate a medical downgrade. We are organising meetings through AWU delegates and regional managers and look forward to seeing you again soon.

5. Annual HSR Conference

The annual HSR conference will be held on Thursday 27 October in Melbourne, Portland, Morwell, Wodonga and Bendigo. HSRs are entitled to paid leave to attend as long as you give 14 days notice of your intention to attend. This year's theme is psychological health in the workplace.

You will need to register to attend, this is to help with catering. As yet registrations haven't opened, check the Victorian Trades Hall Council's ohsreps or WorkSafe websites from mid September to register.

Hope to see some of you there!

