



Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit  
Managing Mental Health in the Australian Federal Police  
(Auditor-General Report No.31 2017-18)

22 August 2018

Opening Statement by Mr Grant Hehir, Auditor-General for Australia

1. Good morning Chair and Committee Members.
2. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the committee today.
3. Managing employee mental health effectively is a challenge faced by policing and first responder organisations around the world. This includes the Australian Federal Police (AFP) as the Australian Government's primary policing agency responsible for the enforcement of Commonwealth laws and the protection of Australian interests from criminal activity, both domestically and overseas. To fulfil this role the AFP is responsible for a diverse range of functions, the delivery of which place a range of unique demands and stressors on AFP employees.
4. Safe Work Australia's Work-Related Mental Disorders Profile 2015 concluded that first responders—that is police, emergency and health services—were the combined occupational group most likely to make a workplace compensation claim based on mental health injury, with incidence rates and costs substantially exceeding other occupational groups.
5. The *Managing Mental Health in the AFP* audit examined the effectiveness of measures taken by the AFP to manage employee mental health from the perspective of organisational level governance and risk management, the career life-cycle of employees and ongoing monitoring, reporting and evaluation techniques.
6. The audit identified that the AFP lacks a comprehensive and consolidated organisational health and wellbeing framework to enable effective management and support of employee mental health. While the AFP offers a variety of mental health support services, there is no evidence that these services are effective and they are not supported by sound governance, risk management, evaluation or articulated business rationale.

7. Under the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011*, the AFP has the primary duty of care to ensure, so far as is reasonably practical, the health and safety of its workers while they are at work, including both physical and psychological health. Comcare and the Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Commission are established under the *Safety Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 1988* (SRC Act), and jointly administer the statutory framework for rehabilitation and workers' compensation for all Commonwealth entities, including the AFP.
8. Where an AFP employee has a work-related injury or illness, they may seek support to recover from the injury or illness by making a claim to Comcare. The Comcare benefits and entitlements may include: medical expenses, travel costs, household and attendant care, assistance aids or modifications, incapacity benefits, permanent impairment and death benefits. The AFP has experienced a steady increase in the number of Comcare claims for psychological injury, and in the costs claimed by employees that are related to psychological injury, since 2012.
9. The AFP has identified gaps in its management of employee mental health across the organisation and has commenced processes, within existing organisational constraints, to improve the management of employee mental health. Since the end of 2016, eight initiatives have commenced to improve mental health management across the AFP, including an external review of AFP's mental health support services, the establishment of a Mental Health Strategy Board and the launch of an expanded Welfare Officer Network and a wellbeing app—Equipt.
10. The audit made six recommendations. These recommendations were aimed at developing a comprehensive organisational health and wellbeing strategy; reporting on mental health risks across the organisation in a consistent manner, and implementing a mandatory mental health training framework. The recommendations were also aimed at ensuring employees in specialist roles have a psychological clearance in place before commencing, and that mandatory mental health assessments and psychological debriefs are undertaken in a timely manner for all who require them.
11. The audit recommended that as part of the external review being conducted at the time of audit fieldwork in 2017, that the AFP use a risk-based approach to determine the optimal mix of services to support its management of mental health risks. The audit further recommended that the AFP consolidate disparate systems and hard copy records in order to establish an electronic employee health records management system; and that it establish a strategy for

analysing associated employee health data in order to assist in identifying known psychological injury risk factors.

12. The AFP agreed with all six recommendations.

13. We would be happy to answer any questions the Committee may have.