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Dear Dr Worth

**INQUIRY INTO THE RECOGNITION AND ADEQUACY OF THE RESPONSES BY
STATE GOVERNMENT AGENCIES TO EXPERIENCE OF TRAUMA BY WORKERS
AND VOLUNTEERS ARISING FROM DISASTERS**

Please find attached a response from Western Australia Police following a request for submissions from the Chair dated 12 September 2011 in relation to the above Inquiry.

It is important to note that Western Australia Police does not deliver any services through the use of a volunteer workforce. Accordingly, the response provided is in relation to the arrangements that are in place within the agency to mitigate against the effects of trauma arising from disasters on our paid workforce.

I trust the information provided is of assistance to the Inquiry.

Yours sincerely

KARL J O'CALLAGHAN APM
COMMISSIONER OF POLICE

October 2011

Att:

SUBMISSION TO THE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND JUSTICE STANDING COMMITTEE

In response to the specific questions posed we offer the following information:-

Q. 1 What pre-planning and training activities do you undertake with your staff (and volunteers) to deal with trauma before a disaster?

Training and preparation of forensic officers for involvement in Disaster Victim Identification, (DVI)/ Mass Casualty response is a staged process that commences with introductory training for Police Recruits at Academy level. All forensic officers selected for DVI roles must be attached to the Crime Scene Unit of Forensic Field Operations and undergo psychological screening for suitability in that role. This screening includes interview and testing carried out by Psychologists located within the WA Police Organisational Psychology Unit. Prior to selection and placement as a District Forensic Investigation Officer (DFIO) Constables must complete the following;

- Police Recruit - Psychological Screening
- Police Recruit Training – Academy
- Probationary Constable Workbook

After successful completion of the Probationary period, Constables are eligible to complete a "FOR1" training course, consisting of a one week in the classroom and a one week practical placement at DFIO. The classroom training consists of introductory training focusing on photography, fingerprinting and exhibit and crime scene management. Constables who successfully complete the FOR1 course are eligible for placement at DFIO where they commence the Forensic Workbook;

- FOR1 Training
- Forensic Workbook (volume crime). Demonstrated skills based on underpinning knowledge - 7 specific areas of focus.

Constables at DFIO are eligible to apply for placement at the Crime Scene Unit. This is a highly competitive process and officers generally have completed at least 2 years of DFIO service prior to selection. Applicants will participate in psychological screening by the Organisational Psychology Unit to assess suitability to enter the Forensic Division. Once at the Crime Scene Unit personnel undertake the following training;

- Forensic Workbook (major crime). Demonstrated skills based on underpinning knowledge - 9 specific areas of focus
- Diploma Public Safety (Forensic Investigation)

Crime Scene Unit staff are then selected for attachment to one of the specialist disciplines to be trained in Ballistics, Physical Evidence, Surveying, Blood Pattern Analysis, Bomb Scene or DVI. Those officers who are selected to specialise in the DVI field then undertake the following DVI specific training;

- DVI Practitioners Course
- DVI Phase 1 Training
- DVI Phase 2 Training
- DVI Phase 3 Training
- DVI Team Leader
- DVI Coordinator

- Plassdata and Reconciliation
- Incinerated Remains
- Human Remains Recovery

The role of DVI for Forensic personnel is an extension of general forensic tasks performed on a daily basis by specialist personnel. The general DVI role requires expert photography, fingerprinting, crime scene management, exhibit management, biological sampling and human remains management in a post mortem environment, all of which is taught during the general forensic training process. The DVI specific role is limited to the administration and management of these skills in a mass casualty environment and therefore is administrative training in nature, not forensic specific. It must however be recognised that deployment of forensic personnel to DVI scenes would not be possible without the underpinning academic and skills training that is provided through the forensic training process.

In addition to the forensic training, the Forensic Training Unit have coordinated DVI training and awareness for general duties police personnel in areas such as antemortem collection, family liaison and reconciliation. These roles are not forensic related but form part of the overall disaster response role performed by WA Police. In 2010 - 2011, a varying level of DVI training has been delivered to officers across the state.

Specific details for the DVI training

- DVI Commanders Course (1 week) – 13 x metro and regional staff. This training included a Psycho-Educative session from Health & Welfare's Forensic Liaison Clinician to ensure Commanders understand their psychological duty of care responsibilities in managing deployed DVI officers.
- DVI Basic Operatives course (1 week) – 24 x Forensic & DFIO staff. This training included a Psycho-Educative session from Health & Welfare's Forensic Liaison Clinician to increase awareness of psychological care relating to DVI work. The Clinician also performed behavioural observations during the practice based training to assess suitability.
- Plass Data/Reconciliation course (1 week) – 11 x metro staff
- Ante Mortem training (2 days) - 21 FLOs (20 x metro, 1 x South West). This training included a Psycho-Educative session from Health & Welfare's Forensic Liaison Clinician to increase awareness of psychological care relating to DVI work.
- Regional Phase 1 and 3 awareness training (2 days)
 - Pilbara – 12
 - Great Southern – 8
 - South West – 8
 - Mid West/Gascoyne – 9
 - Goldfields/Esperance – 8
 - Wheatbelt – 9

In a disaster event forensic staff who have undertaken the aforementioned training are selected to attend. Attendance is not mandatory; all those who attend do so by choice. Presently, the DVI coordination staff maintain a list of suitably trained personnel who are prepared for response. The officers contained in this list have been trained in general forensic work and DVI specific processes. They hold full operational status and have been checked by Health and Welfare personnel as being physically and mentally healthy. This

means they are not known to be suffering from any diagnosable psychological condition, and have not had a known significant physical concern within the last twelve months. This process is undertaken by a Specialist Clinical Psychologist and an Occupational Health Physician by file review and then by individual interview where necessary. The DVI list is reviewed periodically to ensure suitability remains and officers are also asked to assume some personal responsibility regarding maintaining their wellbeing and self de-selecting if they know themselves to be unfit for the role.

Q. 2 What annual budget you spend on these pre-event activities?

Due to the nature of the forensic training process, all training is managed by the Forensic Training Unit and no specific budget is maintained for DVI training. The total 2011-12 training budget for the Forensic Division is \$185,700.

Q. 3 What programs do you undertake during a disaster to assist your staff and volunteers deal with trauma?

Immediately prior to deployment to a Disaster event the names of those selected are again reviewed by Forensic Divisional management, DVI Co-ordinator and Health and Welfare to ensure suitability for deployment. Information pertaining to the officers and their immediate family is collected to facilitate support and contact during the course of the deployment. Officers are then supplied with 24 hour support numbers for the DVI Coordinator, Specialist Clinical Psychologist and WA Police Health and Welfare Branch. Officers receive telephone contact from the DVI Commander, DVI Coordinator and H&W's Specialist Clinical Psychologist during the deployment, although it should be noted that telephone communications are sometimes hindered by the working environment's infrastructure, particularly in overseas deployments.

In the past WA Police Health and Welfare Branch have created agreements with support staff (e.g. Chaplains and Psychologists) from other onsite organisations such as AFP and private counselling firms to provide support to WA Police officers during deployment. Feedback from returning officers has indicated that this support was not readily accessible and they have expressed reluctance to speak with unknown support staff from other agencies. Accordingly Health and Welfare Branch Specialist Clinical Psychologist Forensic liaison is exploring alternative arrangements with Forensic Division management, this may include deployment of WA Police support personnel in future disaster events.

The duration of deployment is monitored by the State DVI commander and Health and Welfare Branch's Clinical Psychologist. Deployment durations of not more than 14 days are preferred and situational and individual factors are taken into consideration in determining if the duration should be shortened. It is generally considered that longer deployments or return deployments within short time frames would be detrimental to physical and mental health.

Q. 4 What post event activities do you undertake with your staff and volunteers to deal with the trauma arising from these activities?

Upon return from Disaster Deployment staff usually enter a leave period to allow for fatigue management and reconciliation time with their families. Usually within one week they return to work and participate in a group psychological debrief facilitated by Health and Welfare's Specialist Clinical Psychologist. Individual follow up sessions are provided if indicated. Returned officers meet with the DVI Commander and Coordinator to provide operational feedback/debriefing, which includes discussion of any personal wellbeing concerns. After the initial psychological debrief officers can access support through all the normal Health and Welfare Support mechanisms, which include full access to

Chaplains, internal Specialist Psychologists, external Employee Assistance counselling or through their own community means (eg their General Practitioner).

It should be noted that to date we have not had officers report psychological traumatic sequel following recent disaster deployments, in fact many protective factors are noted. Specifically, they feel honoured to have been chosen for deployment, welcome the opportunity to apply their training in vivo, receive considerable gratitude from the host country/locals, and feel that they have provided an extremely valuable service to the host region/county, particularly to families who will receive a returned (deceased) loved one due to their efforts. All of these factors are deemed to be highly protective, that is, serve to reduce the likelihood of experiencing trauma symptoms.

Q. 5 what annual budget do you spend on these post event activities?

Post event support is an element of the services provided by the Psychology Unit within Health and Welfare Services. No specific budget is maintained for post event support. The annual budget, including salaries in 2011-2012, for the Psychology Unit is approximately \$500,000. The Psychology Unit has significant ongoing responsibilities which include supports and services designed to enhance the psychological well-being and coping capacity of Police Officers and Police Staff and especially for those whose work places them at risk for adverse psychological consequences. Expenditure on post event activities varies annually depending on demand.