

**Question on Notice
No. 625
Asked on 25 March 2010**

MR MALONE asked the Minister for Police, Corrective Services and Emergency Services (MR ROBERTS) -

QUESTION:

With reference to assistance for staff suffering psychological/psychiatric injuries in the Queensland Ambulance Service and the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service (reported separately) –

(1) For 2007-08, 2008-09 and 2009-10 to date, how many employees accessed the targeted employee assistance programs identified in Question on Notice No. 621 of 2008 (reported separately by program)?

(2) As at 30 June 2008, 30 June 2009 and 31 December 2009, how many full-time equivalent staff were employed providing services to employees accessing the programs identified in (1) (reported separately by program)?

ANSWER:

The Bligh Government has a proud history of supporting our emergency services. This includes ensuring staff and volunteers are properly supported and assisted.

The Department of Community Safety has implemented its Workplace Health and Safety Strategy 2007-2010. Under this strategy, workplace hazards and risks are targeted with an ultimate goal of zero harm to departmental personnel. The performance of the 'ZEROharm' initiative is assessed against two key performance indicators in the Department's Annual Report: lost time injury frequency rate which is the number of lost time injuries (one day or greater) per million hours worked and injury downtime rate which is the hours lost to injury as a factor of the total hours worked in the department. The lost time injury frequency rate was 26.73 in 2008-09 and the injury downtime rate was 0.71% in 2008-09. This is a decrease from the lost time injury frequency rate of 28.64 in 2007-08 and the injury downtime rate of 0.77% in 2007-08.

Vital support services like Priority One and FireCare and a peer support network are available to support QAS and QFRS staff and their families. These services provide early specialist intervention, trained peer supporters to provide debriefs following incidents and specialist counselling services.

The QAS encourages staff and immediate family members to utilise the professional services of its 'Priority One' Staff Support Program. Ambulance officers and their immediate family are provided with counselling sessions for both work-related and non-work-related matters. Local counsellors' names and contact details are available from QAS stations or by contacting Priority One.

The QAS Staff Support Services have also developed a range of other initiatives to help support ambulance officers and their immediate families.

These include a 24-Hour Telephone Counselling Service available both to officers and their immediate family members. Telephone counselling is confidential and is available for both work-related and non work-related matters. Other services include Peer Supporter Officers who have undertaken special training to assist their work colleagues cope with personal and job-related difficulties. There is a network of Peer Supporter Officers throughout the State who provide a first line of contact following an incident or when QAS officers may need them.

FireCare is the counselling and support program designed specifically for Queensland Fire and Rescue (QFRS) staff, volunteers and their immediate families. The Peer Support Program provides a team of specially selected and trained co-workers across the state to help staff cope with personal and/or work-related difficulties. Confidential Professional Counselling is provided to staff and their immediate families. A 24-Hour Telephone Crisis Counselling Service is also provided. Telephone counselling is confidential and is available for both work-related and non work-related matters. QFRS offices and stations have a list of Peer Support Officers and list of FireCare counsellors throughout Queensland.

All employee assistance service providers conduct their counselling services in strict confidence. The Department of Community Safety (DCS) is informed of the number of staff accessing counselling services but not the details of the counselling sessions.

In 2007-08, 648 QAS employees accessed the Priority One program, in 2008-09, 624 QAS employees accessed it and in 2009-10 (as at 28 February 2010) 370 QAS employees sought assistance through the Priority One program.

In 2007-08, 232 QFRS employees accessed the FireCare program, in 2008-09, 268 QFRS employees accessed the program and in 2008-09 (as at 28 February 2010), 191 QFRS employees sought assistance from the FireCare program.

Please note that employees access assistance for both work-related and non work-related matters

In 2007-08, two QAS full-time equivalent (FTE) staff were employed to provide the Priority One program along with 39 external counsellors; in 2008-09 three QAS FTE staff were employed to provide the Priority One program along with 39 external counsellors; and in 2009-10 (as at 28 February 2010) three QAS FTE staff were employed to provide the Priority One program along with 39 external counsellors.

In 2007-08, two QFRS FTE staff were employed as part of the FireCare program along with 46 external counsellors; in 2008-09, three QFRS FTE staff were employed as part of the FireCare program along with 51 external counsellors; and in 2009-10 (as at 28 February 2010), – three QFRS FTE staff were employed as part of the FireCare program along with 51 external counsellors.

QAS and QFRS engage the services of counsellors throughout the state to provide the service of professional employee assistance counselling. They are experienced, understanding and willing to support individuals who have a need for a variety of counselling support.

Employees require counselling services for a number of different reasons including personal wellbeing, relationship and family issues, as well as in the aftermath incidents. For this reason a range of counsellors, some with specific skills provide this service to QAS and QFRS staff. Additional counsellors are added to the list of approved counsellors depending on a number of factors including location and speciality. The number of counsellors is not related to the number of sessions booked by staff or their families.