

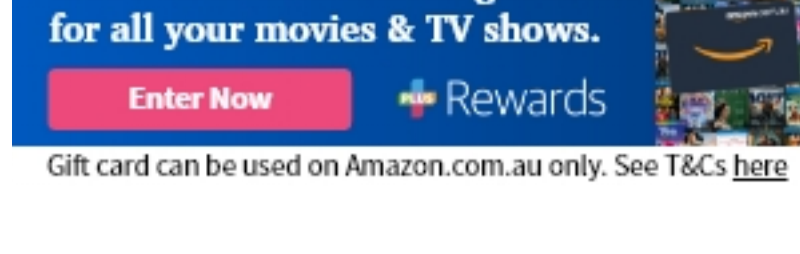
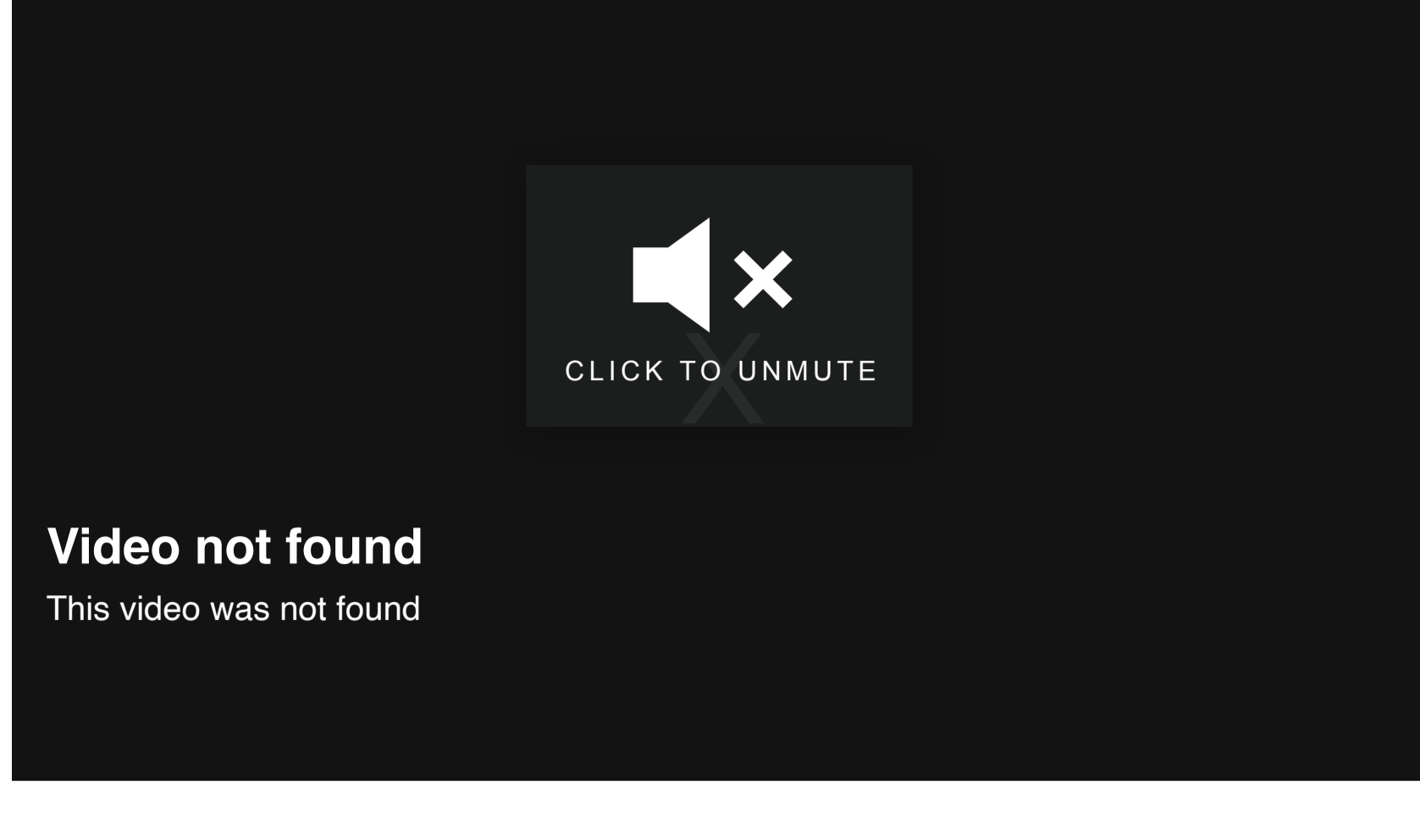
SAPOL police officers lodging stress claims at a rate of one per week, more keeping quiet out of fear

BRUTAL murders, traumatic suicides and incidents of workplace bullying are prompting police officers to lodge stress claims at a rate of one a week.

Elizabeth Henson

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BRUTAL murders, traumatic suicides and incidents of workplace bullying are prompting police officers to lodge stress claims at a rate of one a week.

Figures obtained under Freedom of Information show that 217 claims under the police worker's compensation scheme were lodged with SA Police in the four years to June 30 this year — averaging one claim every week.

Of these, 147 were accepted under the scheme.

Police Association of South Australia president Mark Carroll believes the number of stressed officers could be much higher.

“Our member feedback shows reluctance to admit to a psychological injury for fear of the associated stigma,” he said.

“Our serving officers must be given grounds for confidence in the system so that suffering post-traumatic stress disorder does not, in any way, jeopardise or even end their careers.”

Mr Carroll also said the hazards in police work were “far beyond those of most other occupations” and more funding was needed for new and improved programs to tackle mental health issues.

Data shows almost a quarter of all police deaths in SA are due to suicide.

The association's 2016 member survey revealed 54 per cent of the 1784 respondents believed SA Police did not offer adequate support to those with psychological injury.

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It also showed 76 per cent felt their workload had increased in the past three years.

Mr Carroll said stress triggers among officers included exposure to traumatic incidents, accumulation of stressful circumstances, harassment, victimisation and excessive workloads.

“I would hope that the community understands the implications of these statistics and joins with the Police Association in demanding support,” he said.

One police officer diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, said management was starting to acknowledge mental health issues but more needed to be done.

“The flood gates are going to open if something isn't done,” he said.

The officer, who has been in the force for more than 30 years, said his condition caused him to contemplate suicide and took the joy out of social outings such as dinners with friends.

He said those with mental health conditions were given menial tasks at work, which was often counter-productive and deterred officers from seeking help.

Figures from the police association's submission to a 2015 State Government inquiry into mental health in the workplace showed claim costs for psychological injuries amounted to more than \$2.3 million in 2013/14, an increase of 26 per cent from 2009/10.

A police spokesman said the organisation had measures to assist staff who needed help and plans for more.

Police Minister Peter Malinauskas was unavailable for comment.

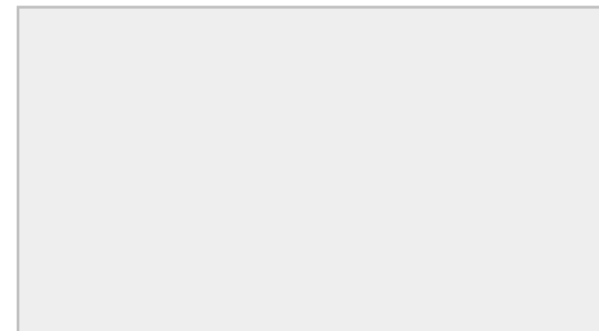
Opposition police spokesman Dan Van Holst Pellekaan said the wellbeing of officers was “paramount”.

Anyone experiencing personal problems can call Lifeline or 131 114 or beyondblue 1300 224 636.



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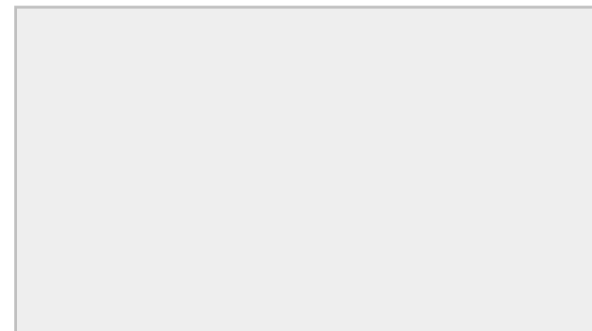


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