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Proposed laws to help emergency services personnel with PTSD

News laws to make it easier for emergency workers to claim support for post traumatic stress have been introduced to South Australia's parliament.

Elizabeth Henson Political reporter

@Eliz_henson January 23, 2020 - 7:30PM The Advertiser

3 comments



New laws that aim to help emergency service personnel suffering from PTSD have been introduced into State Parliament.

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Emergency services workers suffering post-traumatic stress disorder would be able to more easily access support and assistance, under new legislation set to be introduced to State Parliament by SA Best.

Under the Bill, it would be presumed that a first responder's PTSD was work related. That would put the onus on their employer to prove otherwise – rather than the other way around, as it currently stands.

SA Best MLC Frank Pangallo said the legislation aimed to help first responders, including paramedics, police, MFS, CFS and SES personnel, as well as doctors and nurses, access the assistance they needed to deal with PTSD.

“Research indicates our first responders are twice as likely to suffer from suicidal thoughts than civilians,” he said.

“We must break down barriers that prevent first responders from getting the assistance they need to deal with the stress and trauma they face, day in, day out, and to make the claims process easier in the event of a diagnosis of PTSD.”



SA Best MLC Frank Pangallo. Picture: AAP/Emma Brasier

Mr Pangallo said the Bill, which he planned to introduce in February, would be retrospective.

“There are provisions within the Bill to ensure that any claims initiated before the commencement of the amendments will be included, unless that claim has been finalised and all rights of review and appeal in relation to determination have been exhausted,” he said.

An Adelaide paramedic, who wished to remain anonymous, said he “jumped through hoops” before it was formally acknowledged his PTSD was work related.

“If this (legislation) breaks down that barrier and this gives people the confidence to put their hand up without feeling like they're going to be challenged, so they can get the help they need, then that is a good thing,” he said.

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Police Association president Mark Carroll said his union supported the Bill.

“The association has previously urged politicians to consider these changes,” he said. “This is very significant legislation which, if passed, will greatly assist members recovering from PTSD.

“The Bill has our full backing and I will be writing to all politicians urging them to support it.”

Ambulance Employees Association state secretary Phil Palmer described the legislation as “long overdue”.

“We're very concerned about our members' mental health and this is a huge step in the right direction,” he said.

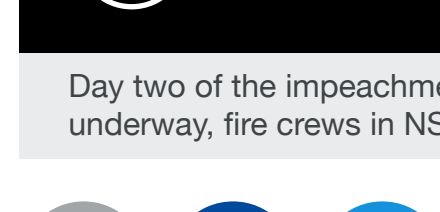
“Our members are at much greater risk than the ordinary population of not just PTSD, but also stress-related (problems).”

Treasurer Rob Lucas said the State Government would consider the Bill but “it's unlikely we would support it”.

“The issue is how do you ... distinguish this particular psychiatric-based claim as being caused by a work circumstances, as opposed to something else that might be going on in a person's life?” he said.

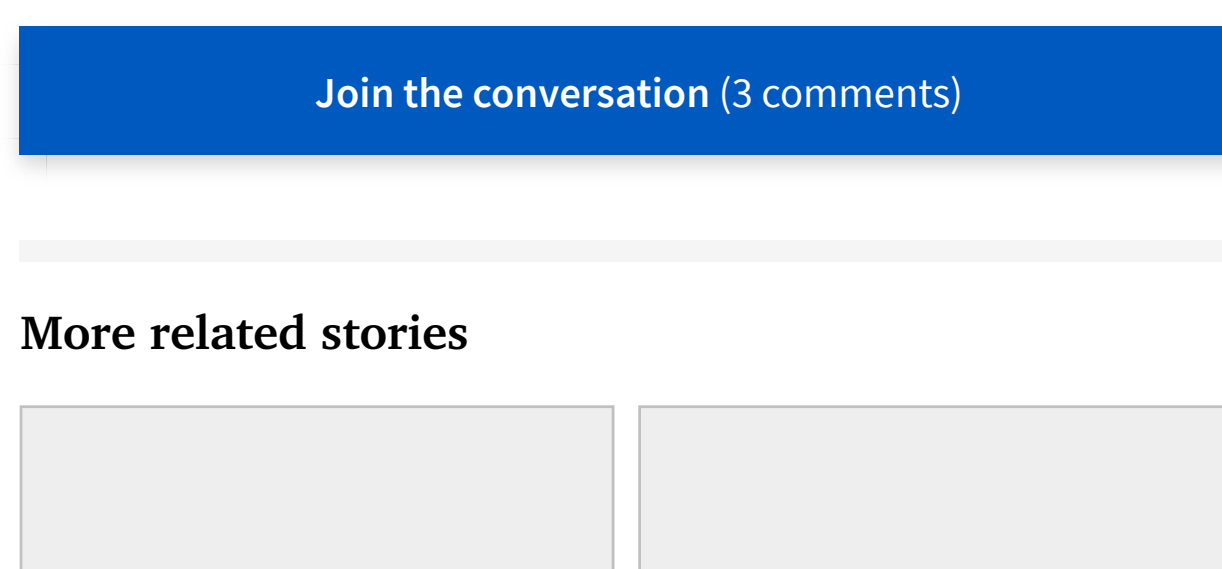


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