

13 October 2016

AUDITOR-GENERAL'S REPORT **Preventing and Managing Worker Injuries**

Police officers and firefighters in NSW are benefiting from an improved focus on preventing and managing injuries, according to a report released today by the NSW Auditor-General. However, the audit found these gains may not be enough to offset risks associated with increasing common law claims, and death and disability scheme costs.

'Emergency service workers face dangerous situations and traumatic scenes' said the Auditor-General 'and are at a significant risk of injury and illness. While the NSW Police Force and Fire & Rescue NSW have made positive shifts towards more proactive injury prevention and better return to work programs and practices, both face significant cost issues.'

Annual premiums for the NSW Police Force death and disability scheme remain above the statutory target, and scheme liabilities for Fire & Rescue NSW have more than doubled since 2013.

The NSW Police Force has introduced a number of health promotion and injury prevention initiatives since the last performance audit in 2014, some on a trial basis.

'Health checks, innovative physical reconditioning and psychological resilience training received good feedback' said the Auditor-General 'and formal evaluations should inform decisions about further roll-out.'

Fire & Rescue NSW has implemented better processes to manage worker injuries, reducing the impact of injuries on workers and costs to the agency.

'The introduction of new programs to promote fitness and mental health is a positive development' said the Auditor-General 'but the reliance of some programs on voluntary participation is an issue. Fire & Rescue NSW should introduce ongoing mandatory assessments of firefighter health and fitness to reduce the risk of injury.'

Workers compensation premiums for both the NSW Police Force and Fire & Rescue NSW have been contained, largely due to improved management of injured workers. The audit also found that both agencies improved the ways they help injured officers return to work on alternate duties, although the placement of workers with longer term injuries remains a challenge. Better identification of suitable roles for recovering workers will help keep them connected with the workplace and improve prospects and outcomes.

Further information

A full copy of the report is on the Audit Office website.

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