

Trauma support policy

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Policy statement and principles

What

Police work can sometimes be traumatic and disturbing with the potential to lead to occupational stress for employees. Everyone has different reactions to stress and traumatic events. For some, the psychological impact of their involvement in serious incidents may be great. In other cases, it is the cumulative exposure to a number of events which adversely affects the wellbeing of employees.

Why

The 'Trauma support policy' provides:

- access to appropriate psychological assessment and support for all employees to:
- assist in the maintenance of their health and wellbeing
- minimise post incident reactions and the risk of developing ongoing psychological harm
- a timely and confidential response to employees following their attendance at 'Critical Incidents'
- a process to ensure that employees are psychologically fit to perform their duties

How

Police will:

- ensure referrals under this policy are made to Wellness Advisors by supervisors following attendance at identified critical incidents
- ensure assessment and treatment of employees is provided by suitably qualified psychologists contracted to New Zealand Police in line with current best practice as supported by the latest literature
- communicate that this policy is not designed to replace good management, supervisory practices or personal coping skills. It is however a well-established support function for assisting employees to maintain their psychological wellbeing.

Trauma support services

Who can access trauma support?

Assistance is available to all Police employees:

- following attendance at or significant involvement in a critical incident
- adversely affected by the impacts of policing, or organisational impacts.

Personal issues are not covered by the 'Trauma support policy' (see '[Other related assistance for employees](#)' below).

Application to non-Police persons

Support under this policy to non-Police persons will be considered on an individual basis where there has been a direct impact from a work related event on:

- a family member of an employee
- a volunteer who is engaged directly by NZ Police (excludes those engaged by a volunteer organisation such as LandSAR)
- a Police applicant (e.g. Scope).

In such cases, a referral from the district Wellness Advisor may be made in consultation with the Wellness team leader and with approval from the Director Safer People.

NZ Police expects that the organisations engaged to assist in potentially traumatic work will have procedures in place to support their workers. Police are often recognised as having valuable experience in arranging trauma support and will share this experience with collaborating organisations. Refer to the '[NZSAR Dealing with Exposure to Trauma](#)' brochure as an example of this.

What support is provided?

The Wellness Advisor will conduct an [Initial Assessment](#).

A psychologist may provide up to three hours of one-on-one consultation, which may include:

- assessment
- debriefing from specific incidents
- psychological education
- Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT)
- Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) therapy
- clearance to return to duties.

Note that consumers of psychology services have the right to informed consent as per [The Code of Health and Disability Services Consumers' Rights \(1996\)](#), which means they have the right to engage with or refuse to engage with psychological services at any stage.

Refer to the [Process for psychologist referrals](#) for an outline of the process followed when an employee is referred to a psychologist for trauma support.

Further sessions with a psychologist, if recommended by the psychologist, will be considered based on the [Initial Assessment](#) and the psychologist's assessment of the need for further sessions. All requests for additional sessions must be approved by the Wellness team leader.

Most employees will obtain the treatment they require from the psychologist. However, it is recognised that some employees will require specialist treatment, and some, long term specialist treatment (e.g. for post-traumatic stress disorder or trauma related psychosis). In these cases, a review of the individual case will be conducted by the Wellness team leader and submitted to the Wellness manager for approval. Employees must obtain prior approval before they see the specialist, for Police to meet the cost of treatment.

How to access trauma support

All trauma support services are coordinated by the district Wellness Advisor.

An employee's supervisor may request a Wellness Advisor to contact them, and must do so under certain circumstances, including;

- involvement in [critical incidents](#)
- notifiable injury or illness (as defined in [s23](#) of the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015)
- threat to the employee's life while on duty
- disaster victim identification incidents
- attendance at delayed recovery of body/bodies
- attendance at any unnatural death
- attendance at a high number of critical incidents over a short period of time
- operational incidents involving the loss of a Police employee's life
- incidents where Police interventions fail to prevent loss of life or injury to others, e.g. domestic incidents, failed negotiations
- death or serious injury involving a baby or young child
- attending incidents that involve other Police employees or their family members
- unpleasant or stressful duties, e.g. protracted enquiries, cases where aggravated and/or unpleasant factors exist.

Employees may also self-refer by contacting their [district Wellness Advisor](#) directly and may find the Critical Incident Information Booklet below helpful.

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 [Critical Incident Information Booklet 2021](#)

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Wellness Advisors will also follow up employees involved in any traumatic events that come to their attention, which have not been referred by a supervisor.

Initial Assessment

Wellness Advisors will educate the employee around the effects of traumatic events and conduct an Initial Assessment to determine the need for further specialist assessment and support services. Depending on the nature of the incident, Wellness Advisors will make contact with the employee via telephone, email or face-to-face to information around the effects of exposure to trauma and reminding the employee of the support available.

Where an incident was particularly traumatic, or where the employee requests further support, the Wellness Advisor will then meet with the employee to determine the need for further specialist assessment and support.

Mandatory referrals to psychologists

Referrals to psychologists are mandatory following a critical incident, and in exceptional circumstances, as outlined below.

Exceptional circumstances

In exceptional circumstances, individuals in specialist or general response roles who have had a significant exposure to trauma, e.g. in events such as natural disasters (significant natural disasters) or mass homicides (acts of terrorism), are also required to undertake a mandatory referral. The nature and magnitude of these events requires us to ensure that those employees are offered adequate and timely advice to assist them in managing the impact of such events on their wellbeing.

Trauma support following critical incidents

Summary of immediate actions following a critical incident

This table summarises the responsibilities and immediate actions required to ensure employees involved in critical incidents are appropriately supported and other obligations are met.

| | If critical incident involves a police shooting which contributes to a life-threatening injury or death: | If critical incident does not involve a shooting (i.e. fleeing driver, death in custody), which contributes to a life threatening injury or death: |
|---|--|---|
| CILO (Critical Incident Liaison Officer) or Supervisor | CILO is appointed to Constable A (and B, if applicable). CILO carries out tasks of a CILO in accordance with the Checkpoint app checklist, in partnership with the local Wellness Advisor. | If no-one is appointed solely to the CILO role, the involved officer's supervisor may be appointed to fulfil the requirements of the CILO role when serious events and harm occur. CILO/Supervisor of involved officer(s) to complete critical incident supervisor duties as per the Checkpoint app checklist in consultation with Wellness Advisor. |
| Wellness | Immediate referral to Wellness Advisor | Immediate referral to Wellness Advisor |
| D&A testing | District Command Centre (DCC) will arrange D&A testing as soon as practicable for Constable A (and B, if applicable) in consultation with CILO, who will be informed of the results via Director Safer People. | If applicable in the Police drug and alcohol policy, District Command Centre (DCC) will arrange D&A testing as soon as practicable for Constable A (and B, if applicable) in consultation with CILO/Supervisor, who will be informed of the results via Director Safer People. |
| DCC after hours and weekends/H&S ADVISOR normal business hours | To ensure Worksafe notification is made as soon as practicable. | To ensure Worksafe notification is made as soon as practicable. |
| Downtime | Constable A (and B, if applicable) will have mandatory 10-day downtime | Constable A (and B, if applicable) may have mandatory 5-day downtime with an optional further 5 at the joint agreement with DC & Wellness Advisor. |
| Debrief & clearance | Mandatory debrief and clearance to resume duties | Mandatory debrief and clearance to resume duties |
| Reintegration program | Mandatory referral to the Reintegration Program once clearance obtained from the psychologist. | Reintegration Program may be required for involved officers once clearance obtained from the psychologist |

Refer to [Appointments to the Investigation](#) for a full outline of the roles involved following a critical incident.

Refer to the Reintegration Program booklet below for information about the program.

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 [Reintegration Program Booklet 2022](#)

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Mandatory referral to a psychologist following critical incidents

A referral to a psychologist for further assessment and/or debrief **must** occur where an employee is involved in a **critical incident** (e.g.

use of firearm or pursuit of fleeing driver resulting in serious injury) and their actions may have contributed to the death or life-threatening injury of a person. It should also occur for other involved officers, even though they may not have taken positive action.

The first appointment with a psychologist will not occur earlier than 72 hours following a critical incident and ideally the second appointment should occur within 10 days post incident.

Mandatory downtime

Where an employee is involved in a shooting incident and their actions may have contributed to the death or life-threatening injury of a person then they must have 10 days minimum downtime. It is mandatory following these incidents because the action taken is intentional, rather than an unintended consequence as in other critical incidents. A mandatory debrief and clearance is required for staff directly involved (Constable A & B) in shooting incidents. The District Commander must be consulted before any decision is taken to apply downtime. In some instances, involved officers may require additional downtime, which will be informed by the psychologist.

In other instances where an employee is involved in a critical incident (i.e. an incident where their actions may have contributed to the death or life-threatening injury of a person, such as pursuits ending in crashes, deaths in custody) then they may have 5 days downtime, with an additional 5 days if required, based on Wellness Advisor assessment and recommendation in consultation with the District Commander. The application of downtime to other staff involved in critical incidents that do not result in a death or life-threatening injury will be at the discretion of the District Commander in consultation with the Wellness Advisor in the first instance.

All other traumatic and potentially traumatic incidents, including those where a staff member is threatened or assaulted, will be managed in accordance with the NZ Police Trauma Policy, with a psychological debrief available in consultation with the Wellness Advisor. Note: that no downtime or mandatory debrief will be required.

If the employee is injured then the downtime will be considered as sick leave or a combination of applicable types of leave.

Refer to [‘Leave’](#) for further guidance on managing leave.

Clearance to resume duties

For each employee who qualifies for a mandatory referral to a psychologist, the psychologist is required to complete a clearance form before the employee will be considered suitable to return to their normal fulltime duties. The employee will not be able to return to their full substantive role without gaining clearance. This will usually occur within 10 days of a critical incident, but may be later if further support is needed, or upon recommendation from a health practitioner.

The clearance form is supplied to the Wellness Advisor, who will inform the employee and their supervisor.

Where a referral to a psychologist was not mandatory, the decision to resume duties rests with the employee and their supervisor, in consultation with the Wellness Advisor.

Participation in the Reintegration Programme will be informed by a psychologist. Return to work may initially include a period of light duties until the reintegration programme has been successfully completed.

Refer to the [‘Health standards for constables’](#) and [‘Rehabilitation policy and procedures’](#) for further guidance.

Follow up psychologist appointments

Where an employee is involved in a Critical Incident and their actions are deemed to have contributed to the death or life-threatening injury of a person then they must attend appointments with a psychologist at 3, 6, and 12 months after the incident, and annual follow up appointments.

Additional support may be arranged by a Wellness Advisor (in consultation with DC/Supervisor) for an involved officer participating in a criminal investigation, such as upon advice that charges will be laid, release of IPCA/Coroner’s report, during court hearing, and when advised of results.

Related matters

Other related assistance for employees

Employees may be entitled to support and assistance under these related policies:

- 'Wellcheck support' (for employees working within higher risk groups in specific roles)
- 'Employee Assistance Programme' (EAP - for personal and work related issues)
- 'Rehabilitation policy and procedures'
- 'Wellness Policy'
- 'Police chaplaincy services'.

For those with personal health insurance, some financial support for personal issues that are not covered by the 'Trauma support policy' may be available.

Seek advice about all of these policies from your [district Wellness Advisor](#).

Confidentiality

Contact between the employee, Wellness Advisor, and psychologist is confidential and will not be disclosed without the employee's informed consent unless:

- [duty of care obligations](#) apply, or
- there is prejudice to the maintenance of the law or a requirement to disclose information as part of a criminal or employment court process.

If information is required to be disclosed, it is kept to a minimum.

Duty of care obligations

The psychologist has a duty of care obligation to provide any information that indicates in their professional opinion that:

- there is an imminent likelihood of an employee harming themselves or another individual, and
- the disclosure of that information is necessary to prevent or lessen a serious and/or imminent threat to public health or public safety, the life or health of the individual concerned, or others.

If such a likelihood exists, the psychologist will contact the district Wellness Advisor and Wellness Team Leader.

Trauma support policy and performance management

The Trauma support policy will not prevent disciplinary action for serious offences or continued unsatisfactory work performance.

Employees cannot use this policy to avoid performance management procedures or the consequences of not adhering to the New Zealand Police's [Code of Conduct](#).

Service arrangements

Psychological support services are co-ordinated by district Wellness Advisors and provided by approved psychologists. A list of approved psychologists is available from your district Wellness Advisor or the safer people administrator, Safer People.

The overall management, administration and funding of the Trauma support policy is undertaken by Safer People.

Roles and responsibilities

This table outlines the responsibilities of various Police roles in relation to the Trauma support policy.

| Role | Responsibilities |
|-----------------------|---|
| Employees | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Actively managing and monitoring own wellbeing and seeking assistance when required. - Attending all appointments and if unable to do so providing appropriate notice (24 hours). - Maintaining an active and collaborative relationship with their supervisor and the Wellness Advisor in relation to support from this policy, if appropriate. |
| Supervisors | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Maintaining overall responsibility for monitoring and minimising risk of psychological harm for employees. - Maintaining an active and collaborative relationship with the employee and the Wellness Advisor with respect to this policy. - Assisting in ensuring the wellbeing of their employees by providing access to appropriate assistance within the scope of this policy. - Notifying Wellness Advisors of employees who they believe may require assistance under this policy. |
| Psychologists | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Treating employees and liaising with managers and Wellness Advisors, as appropriate. - Treating all information disclosed by, and discussed with, Police employees in accordance with the provisions of the Code of Ethics of the New Zealand Psychologists Board, the Privacy Act 2020 and the Health Practitioners Competency Assurance Act 2003. - Advising the Wellness Advisor and Wellness team leader of all instances where there is an imminent likelihood of an employee harming themselves or others as per limits of confidentiality. |
| Wellness Advisors | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Responding in a timely manner to critical incidents that are notified or that they become aware of. - Providing education in relation to the range of emotional, behavioural and physical responses individuals may have and explaining the services available through this policy. - Providing an assessment and referral, if required. - Completing associated administrative tasks in a timely manner. - Providing ongoing monitoring and follow up of the employee when a referral is made to a psychologist. - Advising the Wellness team leader of all instances where there is an imminent likelihood of an employee harming themselves or others as per limits of confidentiality. |
| Wellness team leader | <p>Responsible for the:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - clinical practice and service provision of the Wellness Advisors - clinical oversight of referrals and requests for extensions. - Ensuring appropriate selection of psychologists and monitoring their ongoing service delivery. - Approving extension requests. - Analysing and reporting on national and district organisational trends. |
| Wellness Manager | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensuring appropriate and timely management and administration of the policy. - Monitoring service delivery to ensure employees receive appropriate assistance. |
| Director Safer People | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensuring appropriate management and funding of the policy. |