

FACT SHEET: POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS from Ambulance Victoria, Fire Rescue Victoria, Triple Zero Victoria, and Victoria Police considering the ESF Residential Wellbeing Program

THE EMERGENCY SERVICES FOUNDATION RESIDENTIAL WELLBEING PROGRAM – RETURN TO WORK INITIATIVE

The Emergency Services Foundation Residential Wellbeing Program – Return to Work initiative (ESF RWP-RTWi) 'the program' is a project facilitated by the Emergency Services Foundation (ESF) to support the return-to-work journey for workers from Ambulance Victoria, Fire Rescue Victoria, Triple Zero Victoria and Victoria Police with a **mental injury**.

The program is a small group (8 participants per program), peer-based, relationship-centred residential retreat. It aims to provide a concentrated period of support over 4 days. Designed to address symptoms associated with exposure to occupational stressors and trauma the program focuses on sustainable outcomes for injured workers recovering from a mental injury who are motivated to return to work. It complements other treatments that injured workers may be receiving.

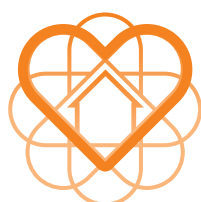
The program was designed by ESF and piloted in 2024. Evaluation by Phoenix Australia, Melbourne University found the program to deliver significant clinical and personal benefits to participants. Most of the pilot participants did not have a mental injury claim but they recognised they needed help as an early intervention.

The RWP RTWi is a project funded by WorkSafe to assess if the ESF program can provide the same benefit to people with a mental injury and assist their return to work. As such it involves evaluation and participants must be willing to contribute to that process.

Participating in the RWP will not impact on an injured worker's ability to access other suitable treatments, services, and benefits they are eligible to as part of the claim. It compliments other treatments that injured workers may be receiving.



The RWP is a project funded entirely by Return-to-Work Innovations at WorkSafe Victoria. There is a requirement for GP support/referral. rwp.esf.com.au



Residential Wellbeing Program

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Where is the program held?

The program takes place at 'The Cape Retreat,' Cape Schank on the Mornington Peninsula over four consecutive days.

Each participant has their own private room with ensuite. There will be no other guests apart from the program participants. The ESF clinicians/ facilitators will also be staying on site.

It is a venue that ESF rents as required. It has been chosen for its privacy and amenities, homelike setting, and position in nature.

The venue is 103km from Melbourne or around one hour and 20-minute drive. Participants are expected to make their own way to Cape Schanck. If you are unable to arrange your own transport, speak with your Case Manager.

What is involved at the program?

The program involves eight participants, all emergency service workers, guided by two clinicians over four intensive days of learning and reflection focused on skill development and behaviour change intervention that draws on multiple therapeutic modalities including Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), Exposure Therapy, Written Exposure Therapy, and Life Review. In addition, you will be introduced to a range of nervous system reset techniques and develop skills that will assist your recovery.

It might be a lovely setting, but the program is no walk in the park. Be prepared to be challenged and for long days. It requires commitment to want to heal and recover.

Listen here to what former participants want you to know about the program.

rwp.esf.com.au



Who is eligible to attend?

To be eligible to participate in the program you will:

- Need to be a current employee of either Ambulance Victoria, Fire Rescue Victoria, Triple Zero Victoria, or Victoria Police
- Have an approved mental injury claim.
- Have no or partial capacity to work.
- Have a GP Health provider referral
- Demonstrate commitment to actively engage in recovery to enable return-to-work.
- Be within the first 26 weeks since your claim lodgment.
- Be 50 years or younger. There is some discretion allowed.
- Demonstrate motivation to return to work.
- Voluntarily agree to participate.
- Need to meet the intake requirements which include completing a health and wellbeing survey and participating in a one-on-one online conversation with ESF facilitator/ clinician to determine suitability for group therapy and capacity to meet the inherent psychological and emotional requirements of the program safely and effectively
- Agree to the program conditions including participation in a comprehensive project evaluation process and nominating a support person.



How will I benefit by attending the program?

The program will not suit everyone. It is important that you carefully consider if it will be right for you and this is something you will be able to discuss with your GP and case manager or a program clinician/facilitator when you meet.

The program provides a unique intensive opportunity to focus on improving your mental health and wellbeing while developing skills that will enhance your capacity to return to work. There is nothing else like it available in Australia.

The program will complement other treatments you are undertaking so it is important your health providers understand that it will not impact on your ability to access other treatment, services, and benefits that you are eligible for as part of your claim. A fact sheet is available for you to share with your health provider.

The program provides you with 'timeout' to totally focus on your wellbeing in a safe and supportive environment.

Importantly it is with people who share similar experiences as emergency service employees, and you will be guided by facilitators/clinicians who have a deep understanding of that working environment. It does not feel like a clinical setting although it aims to help you heal.

Support Person

Everyone who attends the program must nominate a support person. This is someone who will be there to support you when you are preparing to attend the program and most importantly when you get home and are adapting to day-to-day routine after four intensive days of the program. We don't want you to go home to a void where no one understands what you have taken part in.

ESFs research highlighted the value of every participant having a personal support person and this is mandatory to being accepted. It can be a partner, parent, sibling, friend, or colleague. It doesn't matter so long as they are prepared to support you through the experience of the program. ESF will support the support person through an online awareness and education session so they can fully understand how the program works and what to expect from you when you come home. We will also connect them through that session with other support people. Experience shows this is very well received.

To help you choose wisely you are encouraged to look at the videos on the ESF website and read the potential support person fact sheet before you approach someone. Like you, they need to be prepared to take part in the evaluation process through a survey and discussion group once you have finished the program.

How do I get referred to the program?

You can only be referred to the program by your WorkCover Case Manager.

1. Your Case Manager will discuss the program with you and together it will be determined if you meet the eligibility criteria.
2. There is a requirement for GP support and referral and we encourage you to discuss your interest in being referred to the program with your health provider. A fact sheet is available for you to share with your health provider.
3. Once you decide you wish to proceed your Case Manager will refer you to ESF.

It is important to note that referral is no guarantee of acceptance into the program. Spaces are limited with just eight participants per program – 160 in total between July 2026 – December 2027.

The intake process

1. Within five days of your referral being received you will be contacted by ESF and provided an online health and wellbeing survey
 2. An ESF program clinician/facilitators will review your survey results before arrangements are made for an online conversation to discuss your personal circumstances. The facilitator/clinician will determine if you are suited to this sort of program.
 3. If you are not considered well suited to this sort of program, you will be advised and counselled.
 4. If you are accepted, the Senior Program Lead, will work with you to help you prepare to join one of the scheduled programs. She is available to support you throughout your journey on the program and with ESF.
 5. You will be asked to sign an Agreement which outlines the terms and conditions of participation including such things as no alcohol and non-prescription drugs allowed, commitment to participate fully over the four days, and participation in the evaluation process.
 6. You will be asked to provide contact details of your support person.
 7. You will attend the residential program of four days and three nights at Cape Schanck.
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After the program

After the program there are three follow ups scheduled with your facilitator including one with your cohort group, one with your support person and one with your health provider. You will likely also have developed strong relationships with other participants, and this has been found to create an additional support network.

You will be asked to complete four online surveys after the program at 1 / 3 / 6 and 12 months and participate in a discussion group with other participants. We totally understand that answering surveys can be a pain but that is essential for the impact of the program to be evaluated. Without your involvement in this way the project cannot be effectively evaluated.

Advice from past participants

The program is most often described as 'life changing.' Other emergency services workers who have been through the program suggest that you:

- Take the opportunity to care for YOU. During the program you are not an emergency services worker, partner, parent, carer, or other. You can be who you are right now, with no other responsibilities for four days of learning and healing. It is a massive opportunity!
- Be honest and vulnerable – it will help with your healing.
- Know up front – 'you will find it challenging – it's no walk in the park – but you will be safe!'
- 'You will be seen, safe and heard from the moment you step through those doors.'
- Don't worry, it is separate from your employer, confidential amongst your group and the ESF clinician/facilitators.
- Enjoy the ambience of the location.
- Learn from the facilitators.
- Lean on the ESF team.
- Listen to each other.
- 'I felt that the best thing going into a Residential Wellbeing Program was knowing the experience, process has been assessed and measured – evidence based to make a positive difference for the participants. – 'You can trust that.'
- Allow yourself to be open to the process.
- The connection with other participants is valuable beyond words.
- You will get out of this what you put in, the way to do that is to be open with yourself and the others in your group.
- No need to bring snacks. The food is wonderful!
- Bring yourself a card with words of support, a heartfelt message from your support person or something meaningful or photos of things that matter to you. I looked at them and read the card every day that I was staying at the program and it really provided me with support and comfort.
- Be prepared to be vulnerable.
- Bring comfortable clothes to lounge about in – you spend a lot of time sitting.
- Morning and night you will have a chance to go for a walk so take appropriate walking shoes.
- Yoga was optional to participate in each morning (everything was provided by the facilitator of yoga) this was a really nice way to start each day. Or not, if you need a little extra sleep after challenging work the day before.
- The rooms are beautiful, but it was nice to have your own pillow.
- You will be in a safe space, be open, honest, and prepared to share, but be more prepared to fully listen without judgement when others share with you.
- If you practice any form of mindfulness or meditation, use that in the days before to get yourself in a good space, there will be more opportunities to continue this throughout the residential, and it does help.
- Practice some self-care techniques before the residential program and be assured that you will be cared for during and after
- Use the precious moments of down time between sessions to reflect, energise, exercise, don't use them to catch up on emails or check your social media feeds. Honestly – if you could leave your device behind, or leave it turned off and locked in the car you will be much better off.
- Don't go back to any kind of big event, you need at least a day to sit with what you experienced before you go back to anything 'normal.' So, plan the time at the Residential Wellbeing Program to also include time after the program to adjust.

To help you decide if you want to be referred to the program.

- Discuss your eligibility with your Case Manager
- Go to the ESF website and listen to what former participants say about the program.
- Check out the ESF website:

rwp.esf.com.au



KEY CONTACT

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More information is available on the ESF website

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