

## FAQs

### More information about the St John reviews

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#### The process

**Q. How long was the reporting process?**

A. St John announced the formation of the Independent Oversight Panel (IOP) in April 2015 and it received the final copy of the report in late August.

The reporting process encompassed the reviews completed by Western Australia's Chief Psychiatrist as well as a comprehensive review by the Phoenix Centre for Post-Traumatic Stress studies at Monash University.

The role of the IOP was to review these two pieces of work, as well as to conduct its own enquiry.

**Q. Who was on the Independent Oversight Panel?**

A. The panel consisted of:

- Chairperson - Dr Neale Fong – former Director General WA Health Department and current Chairman of the Ministerial Council for Suicide Prevention.
- The Hon Ian Taylor – former Minister for Health and current Chairman of Rural Health Workforce Australia.
- Professor Sandy MacFarlane - Director of the University of Adelaide Centre for Traumatic Stress Studies.

**Q. Who did the IOP talk to?**

A. The panel review was advertised internally to all St John staff members and volunteers, and in *The West Australian*, inviting all interested parties to make submissions or make requests to attend private hearings with the Panel. 72 current staff and volunteers provided feedback during the six week consultation period. In addition, the panel also interviewed four members of St John staff.

**Q. Why has St John undertaken this process?**

A. The catalyst for this process was the tragic suicides of five staff and volunteers. St John wanted to understand whether and how workplace factors may have contributed and petitioned the Health Minister, requesting that the Chief Psychiatrist review these incidents. This report was released in March of this year.

In addition, and to further understand what areas it needed to improve on, St. John itself then commissioned two more reviews, namely:

- Independent Oversight Panel (IOP)
- Phoenix Centre for Post Traumatic Mental Health, based at Melbourne University.

St John looked to the reviews to help gather information on:

- The effectiveness of workplace wellbeing programs and support structures.
- Factors surrounding paramedic and ambulance and volunteer suicides.
- The management of psychological risks in the workplace, and,
- Workplace culture, including issues of bullying and harassment.

***Q. What are the findings of these three reports?***

A. The IOP, which considered both the Phoenix review and the Chief Psychiatrist's report, produced 24 findings and 27 recommendations. The CEO's response to the reviews along with the full text of these can be found at [www.stjohnambulance.com.au/reviews](http://www.stjohnambulance.com.au/reviews)

***Q. Why did this process take so long?***

St. John's desire was for real, meaningful answers and to obtain this we could neither rush nor influence the process. We wanted it to be a rigorous, transparent and comprehensive review process.

***Q. How does this impact the public?***

A. We want to assure everyone in the West Australian community that our services will not be compromised in any way as a result of these reviews. These reviews are paving the way for improvement, for us to address matters on which we could have done better in the past.

The public can and should have every confidence in all of our front line staff and volunteers who serve our community and the organisation as a whole.

## **Bullying and workplace culture**

***Q. What is St John's response to the Phoenix Report saying bullying, harassment and discrimination was prevalent in St John?***

A. St John is committed to creating and maintaining an emotionally safe, productive, positive, bullying-free organisational culture. These reports show that St John's rates of bullying are consistent with other large organisations. That being said, our view is that even one incident of bullying is unacceptable and we want to go further than most organisations go to create a bullying free culture.

St John takes bullying seriously and takes a zero tolerance approach.

St John has been conducting appropriate workplace behavior training for the last three years, including ongoing education, increased on-line resources, and the engagement of a workplace culture expert to deliver additional training across the business. This will be enhanced with the engagement of a specialist organisation to assist in the improvement of our organisational culture and allowing everyone the opportunity to have a say in how we improve.

## Wellbeing and support model

**Q. Phoenix Report indicated people would rather seek support from a peer or a third party rather than the wellbeing and support team. Why this lack of confidence?**

A. We accept and respect the work of Phoenix on the whole, however there are some aspects, such as this, where our data tells a different story. We know that more and more people are accessing the resources of the Wellbeing and Support team as the organisation becomes more and more aware of the depth of support on offer. In 2014 we had an average of 15 staff accessing wellbeing and support services each month and in 2016 this has increased to 250 every month.

The St John model is also designed for people to seek help in a number of ways; it acknowledges that people have different preferences when it comes to dealing with stress and psychological health and offers a range of support mechanisms as a result.

**Q. What is our response to the criticism of St John's wellbeing and support program?**

A. The IOP has provided 27 recommendations that give us an excellent framework towards our goal to create a work environment that ensures the best possible mental health for our staff and volunteers. The panel has also offered an extensive literature review focused on addressing mental illness in the first responder sector.

However, to accurately interpret the IOP report, it's necessary to understand its context and scope.

To ensure participants were freely and confidentially heard through this process, the IOP chose a methodology that did not test their submissions by hearing counter argument (ie other sides of a story) or by testing their evidence. Rather, their process sought to invite views and identify themes.

The IOP report presents us with quite a number of issues. To accurately understand them, the first two steps we need to take are to act on recommendations 1 and 2 of the IOP:

- Establish our own Expert Advisory Group to support our workforce wellbeing program
- Instigate a workforce-wide survey to accurately understand the views and experiences of the entire St John workforce.

The panel has recommended we take this latter step noting that it did not review a representative sample of our workforce, and it has not been able to test the validity of contributions:

*"The consultation process was not intended to provide a representative sample of the St John workforce. With approximately 100 staff voices contributing to the Review, it is only a small proportion of the total workforce and the views expressed cannot be extrapolated across the entire workforce. Readers should therefore interpret the relevant sections of this Report with this knowledge."*

*"Similarly, it is important to emphasise the subjective nature of the information provided through the consultation process and represented in Chapter 7 of this Report. What appears are the opinions and views put forward by individuals, and the Panel has not attempted to confirm or negate the objectivity of the comments made. Rather, the Panel has attempted to identify key themes raised by the participants and highlight the issues."*

The IOP has only been able to hear from 72 of our 7,500 staff and volunteers. That's 72 people who say they are not happy with the way St John supports them, and we take that seriously, and sincerely thank them for sharing their views.

However, while we embrace the panel's recommendations, these limitations do require of us a great deal of measure and care.

## **Regional ambulance services**

***Q. Questions were raised by these reports about the volunteer model in country ambulance. Does the model still work?***

A. The model still serves our community extremely well and remains strong. It's disappointing that the panel expressed this view without examination of the country model. The panel did not interview the Ambulance Service Director or Country General Manager and did not examine any material or evidence associated with the provision of country services. .

## **Unique nature of ambulance work**

***Q. What is St John's response to the finding that it fails to acknowledge the unique nature and increased risk to an individual's psychological health of ambulance work?***

A. It is disappointing to hear this perception. It's so entirely at odds with the comprehensive range of services we have to help our people deal with these risks, the thousands of people who've found help through them, and the direct feedback from so many. So this is telling us that we need to do better in engaging with our people as we continue to develop our Wellbeing and Support services.

## **Career planning and transition**

***Q. How are we dealing with the need to do better in terms of transition to retirement for paramedics or reassigning people to new roles in the event of injury?***

A. We agree with the recommendations around this issue. St John has already commenced working on this issue and will continue to do so, collaboratively, with both workers and their representative organisations to develop new career transition pathways.

We agree also that training for staff moving from frontline service into management roles must be strengthened and ongoing.

## **Training, education and support**

***Q. Is St John going to provide workplace training for managers in how to identify signs and symptoms of stress and how to support their staff?***

A. The existing training that we provide our people will be enhanced to strengthen and support our managers in this area.

## **OTHER**

### **What St John has already addressed**

***Q. What will St John do now that these reports are out?***

A. We are finalising an implementation plan that will address the recommendations.

The first two steps we need to take are to act on recommendations 1 and 2 of the IOP:

- Establish our own Expert Advisory Group to support our workforce wellbeing program
- Instigate a workforce-wide survey to accurately understand the views and experiences of the entire St John workforce.

To maintain the approach of transparency and openness we will keep our people up to date with progress reports, and they will be able to respond to and ask questions about the changes being made.

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