

SLSNSW

Peer Support and Critical Incident Management

Overview and Procedures 2025



SURF LIFE SAVING
NEW SOUTH WALES



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Introduction

Surf Life Saving New South Wales (SLSNSW) is the peak coastal water safety, drowning prevention and rescue authority in New South Wales. Each year, SLSNSW's 21,000 patrolling members volunteer well over half a million hours on patrol across our 129 affiliated Surf Life Saving clubs, across 11 branches.

The SLSNSW Strategic Plan aims to build our Wellbeing system to be one of the best in the sector. It commits to education, awareness and providing the skills and support required to achieve organisational goals. SLSNSW manage many hundreds of incidents each year at beaches across the state. Given the exposure of volunteer members and employees to these incidents, SLSNSW has implemented a Critical Incident Framework to support members and employees with care and appropriate interventions, where required. It is also acknowledged that members and employees may experience personal challenges outside of their SLSNSW role and may benefit from support to fulfill their duties.

The Wellbeing and Peer Support Program aims to enhance and expand upon the Critical Incident support and SLSNSW's commitment to member and employee wellbeing. Wellbeing and peer support will play a key role in supporting members and following critical incidents and/or because of issues in their day-to-day lives. When able to, volunteer Peer Supporters may also provide initial support to operational staff, such as UAV pilots or Lifeguards involved in incidents alongside members. The Wellbeing and Peer Support program operates in conjunction with other support options including the SLSNSW Wellbeing Team and Member/Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

In 2019 SLSNSW implemented the State Welfare Officer Program to provide post Critical Incident support to members alongside Duty Officers and the SLSNSW Membership team. In the 2022/23 season Mental Health and Wellbeing Champions were also trained to provide general mental health support and promote awareness of mental health initiatives. Following a review to ensure sector best practice in the wellbeing space, these roles have been aligned to other emergency services and SLSNSW implemented the Peer Support Program during the 2024/25 season, and this program continues to evolve and improve in the 2025/26 season.

The Peer Support Program is underpinned by two key roles – Wellbeing Officers who support the general wellbeing of members at club level including advocacy for, and promotion of wellbeing projects/programs, and Peer Support Officers who provide psychological first aid to members directly involved in critical incidents that are identified as potentially traumatic.

This document is intended to support the SLSNSW Wellbeing Team with a standard approach towards the recruitment, selection, training and ongoing professional development of suitable members and staff to deliver the Peer Support Program. Furthermore, the framework will underpin the continued growth and sustainability of the Peer Support Program.

Purpose

The Wellbeing and Peer Support program is not intended to provide a counselling service or formal mental health service. It is a volunteer member/staff contact, support and referral program, founded upon the principles of Psychological First Aid (PFA). The evidence base for a peer support program is grounded in research demonstrating the positive impact of conversations with a skilled peer on mental health outcomes, improved wellbeing and recovery. This is particularly well recognised amongst emergency service workers and first responders, who often feel more comfortable talking with a colleague who is familiar with the challenges of their role and is trained in having empathic, non-judgmental conversations.

Psychological First Aid

Psychological First Aid (PFA) is a best practice response to individuals experiencing distress, focusing on providing practical assistance, comfort, and information to promote their emotional wellbeing and resilience. PFA offers compassionate, supportive, and practical aid to individuals who have recently experienced a critical incident or 'potentially traumatic event' (PTE).

While crucial for restoring a sense of safety and order, not everyone affected by an incident requires PFA. It is important to clarify that PFA is distinct from debriefing, counselling, mental health first aid, and does not involve diagnosis or treatment. Derived from extensive research, PFA comprises five key elements: promoting safety, calmness, connectedness, self and community efficacy, and hope.

The methodology that fundamentally underlies the support provided by the Peer Support Program is the promotion and application of PFA.



Wellbeing and Peer Support Program Roles and Responsibilities

Wellbeing Officers

The role of the Wellbeing Officer is to provide a proactive and preventative approach to support the mental wellbeing of members within their club or work area, promote social connection and support across membership/staff groups. The Wellbeing Officers' role is to provide skilled support to individuals who may be experiencing challenges, and encourage and facilitate early help-seeking behaviours. This is a non-clinical role that does not require any specialist psychological or clinical knowledge and appropriate training will be provided. Wellbeing Officers are not expected to provide support outside their regular Club involvement/work hours.

Peer Support Officers (PSO)

The Peer Support Officer (PSO) role is to attend critical incidents across the Branch and provide support to the Duty Officer. The PSO will apply the SLSNSW Critical Incident Support Framework, provide individual well checks post-incident, and refer individuals on to professional support services as required. The PSO will liaise with the SLSNSW Wellbeing Team to ensure members and staff are appropriately supported and Critical Incident Support Framework is followed, including sharing of appropriate data for recording and safety purposes. This is a non-clinical role, with additional experience and training to provide an advanced level of peer support, particularly focused on Critical Incident Support. PSOs report back to the SLSNSW Wellbeing Team who will facilitate conversations with Branch Directors of Lifesaving as required.

Recording of member involvement in incidents will continue to be completed by Branch Duty Officers, however the Branch Duty Officer is encouraged to delegate this task to the Peer Support Officer.

SLSNSW Wellbeing Team

The SLSNSW Wellbeing Team will be responsible for the ongoing coordination of the Peer Support Program, including recruitment, training and maintenance of support resources. They will liaise with PSOs to ensure the SLSNSW Critical Incident Support Framework is followed, coordinate ongoing support of each case and liaise with PSOs (where appointed) to ensure all parties have been contacted, support arrangements agreed, and records have been kept. The SLSNSW Wellbeing Team will provide well checks to individuals where the PSO does not have capacity to complete these. They will also coordinate wellbeing training and information sessions to increase and promote mental health literacy across SLSNSW.

Position descriptions for the Wellbeing Officer and Peer Support Officer are located on the SLSNSW website.

Wellbeing and Peer Support Operating Model

The SLSNSW Wellbeing Team will coordinate the Wellbeing and Peer Support Program from an operational perspective. They will manage the program governance, recruitment and selection process, training and ongoing professional development of Wellbeing Officers and Peer Support Officers. The number of volunteers involved in the Wellbeing and Peer Support Program will be determined in collaboration with Clubs, Branches and SLSNSW.

Rostering and Activation of Branch Peer Support Officers

Whilst it is acknowledged there is significant variation in the number and types of critical incidents, geographical size and membership of various Branches, the intention over time is to build the PSO team to ensure sufficient coverage, utilisation and capacity to balance the role with other Surf Life Saving and external commitments, injury or illness.

Rostering

Rostering of PSOs will be managed by branches and submitted to the SOC via the weekly Branch Briefing Document. Branch Directors of Lifesaving and trained Peer Support Officers are to meet prior to season start to arrange suitable rostering, noting that branches will have varying Peer Support Officer numbers. PSOs should advise the Branch Director of Lifesaving of any unavailability to ensure sufficient coverage.

Activation

Peer Support Officers will be activated by phone call from the SOC, based on the information supplied in the weekly Branch Briefing Document. SOC staff in conjunction with the Duty Officer will determine if a Peer Support Officer is to be activated for face-to-face support in accordance with the SLSNSW Critical Incident Support Framework (see page 5).

The SLSNSW Wellbeing Team can also activate Peer Support Officers to conduct well checks following an incident, and this support is not limited by branch boundaries. This activation can be initiated in situations where the Duty Officer and/



or SOC have identified no available PSO resource, and where appropriate peers are unavailable (e.g. staff ALS where no staff peers are trained). Significant and prolonged incidents such as disasters, major searches, or other incidents involving prolonged trauma and fatigue risks, may require broad activation of PSO resources by the Wellbeing Team.

PSOs will be provided with a uniform and name badge for identification when providing on scene post-incident support.

Peer Support Officers are not to self-activate, and this should only occur through the SOC, Branch Director of Lifesaving, or Duty Officer. Any activation that is not coordinated through the SOC, the Peer Support Officer **MUST** advise the SLSNSW Wellbeing Team via email or text to ensure visibility of their engagement and follow up actions.

When activated to provide support at an incident, PSOs should remain cognisant of their responsibility to maintain safety, and awareness of their legal obligations. PSOs should not rush to attend an incident, and it is reasonably expected that they may have a delayed attendance.

Escalation

The Branch Duty Officer may escalate to the SLSNSW Wellbeing Team where required, such as where there are insufficient Peer Support resources available, a known conflict of interest is perceived with nearby peers, or there are unique risk factors that may require specialist attendance. The SLSNSW Wellbeing Team will then enlist a neighbouring PSO, utilise peers from other agencies (State Emergency Service Peer Support Officers via the existing Memorandum of Understanding), or consider attendance by Rapid Response mental health specialists from the employee assistance provider.

Critical Incident Response Framework

In line with Australian best practice guidelines regarding critical incident support and management, SLSNSW utilise a framework whereby any member or staff member exposed to a critical incident (see below), is contacted and assessed for reactions that may indicate the need for referral to specialist support. In SLSNSW, a critical incident is broadly defined as any directly or indirectly experienced event that has the potential to significantly impact upon mental health, ability to function, and feelings of safety. Whilst this can be different for individuals, they are typically categorised as involving accidental death/near death or serious injury (e.g near/actual drownings, shark attack, serious workplace accidents, prolonged missing persons, or incidents involving children), intentional (e.g. acts of violence, serious crime, abuse), or natural events causing mass disruption/destruction (e.g. flood, tsunami, landslide, etc).

PEER SUPPORT OFFICER ACTIVATION MATRIX			
INCIDENT DESCRIPTION	Level 3 Incident Peer Support Officers to be activated	Level 2 Incident Peer Support Officers <i>may</i> be activated	Level 1 Incident Peer Support Officers <i>unlikely</i> to be activated
	Death / Body Recovery Operation	Mass Rescue (6+)	Missing Person <30 mins
	Any Life-Threatening Injury or fatality	Multi-Agency incident	Hospitalisation of patient
	Serious Member Injury (admitted to hospital)	Rock fisher Rescue	Serious Injury (public)
	Shark Encounter (not sighting)	SAR (Water <60 mins)	
	Missing person search carried over to next day	Member Injury requiring transport to hospital	
		Public Order Incident	



SLSNSW recognise that following a critical incident, many people may experience some reactions and possible changes to their physical state, thoughts, emotions, and behaviours. However, in most instances, these reactions are short lived and subside relatively quickly, within a few days or weeks. Most people make a full recovery and do not go on to experience clinical disorders such as Depression or Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), requiring specialist treatment.

However, a small percentage of the population may be more vulnerable to experiencing strong trauma reactions post-incident. This may be due to a number of reasons including prior experiences of trauma, thinking style, personality traits, limited support, or current major stress.

SLSNSW aim to identify this small proportion of our members and staff that may not cope effectively post incident and ensure that they are linked to the appropriate social supports and professional services to assist them to make a full recovery.

The critical incident response framework includes maintenance and storage of basic confidential data that records and tracks individuals' involvement in critical incidents and participation in the well check support process. Non-identifiable data such as incident numbers, support participation and cumulative trauma within areas of SLSNSW is tracked for program and wellbeing support improvement and development purposes. This database is strictly accessible to SLSNSW Wellbeing Staff only, and no other SLSNSW staff or volunteers have access to this data.

Critical Incident Support Process

SLSNSW have adopted a best practice stepped approach to supporting our members and staff following a critical incident. For many people, critical incidents may be potentially traumatic events, and it is hard to predict how people may respond or be affected, and the level of support they may require.

Accordingly, SLSNSW have implemented a process whereby all members and staff that are directly involved in a critical incident as part of their Surf Life Saving duties, or who are present and witness a critical incident, will be connected with support post-incident. As part of this process, they will be provided with a range of options and resources to ensure their ongoing wellbeing and health.

Members and staff will receive follow up support within certain timeframes to review their coping and recovery and ensure that any strong responses or reactions post-event can be effectively assessed and managed by the appropriate person.

Critical Incident Support Model

Peer Support Officers and the SLSNSW Wellbeing Team will be responsible for managing the wellbeing component of critical incidents by way of onsite support, group information sessions and the provision of individual and confidential well checks with members and staff.

Immediate Incident Support Process



Post Incident Support Process





Operational Debrief

An operational debrief is a routine and formal response to a critical incident and is a helpful tool when conducted skilfully by a Duty Officer. This practice focuses on operational processes and acknowledges environmental conditions, establishes the incident's nature, highlights successful aspects of the response, and identifies areas for improvement to enhance beach tactics or patrol operations. Attendance should always be considered voluntary with individual wellbeing a priority. The operational debrief should not discuss individual mental health or wellbeing topics, nor encourage disclosure of any form. Please refer to the Public Safety SOPS 13.2 for further information.

After Action Review (AAR)

An AAR is a structured evaluation process conducted at least one week/between one to six weeks after an event or incident to assess actions taken, identify lessons learned, and improve future performance. It focuses on reviewing what happened, why it happened, and what can be done differently in similar situations in the future. The AAR should not discuss individual mental health or wellbeing topics, nor encourage disclosure of any form. A Peer Support Officer may be present at this review to identify member concerns and respond appropriately with the individual/s afterwards or should they demonstrate distress/leave the meeting. Additional information can be obtained from the SLSNSW Lifesaving / Emergency Management Teams.

Wellbeing Information Session – Delivery and Timeframes:

A group wellbeing information session is recommended post-incident to bring people together and outline their support options and next steps. This would preferably be conducted by the Peer Support Officer (or Duty Officer if they are not in attendance) and would take place as part of the post critical incident support steps coordinated by the Duty Officer following an event. This is a separate process to an Operational Debrief which would focus more on process, new learnings and recommended changes to SOPs.

The wellbeing information session occurring post-incident should be very clear on the objectives and process. It is important to do the following:

- Acknowledge the incident;
- Recognise that some people may be affected, both physically and mentally;
- Confirm the SLSNSW critical incident support process;
- Advise individual support is available and people will be contacted for a well check (noting that it may be the Peer Support Officer or the SLSNSW Wellbeing Team);
- Provide any positive feedback on what was done well; and
- Highlight resources available to members such as MAP, written material, website, apps.

Importantly, this session is not Psychological or stress debriefing, which has little supportive empirical evidence and can be harmful in some situations. Accordingly, the group session should not:

- Move toward becoming a group counselling or therapy session;
- Encourage people to disclose feelings, ventilate or air their experiences or emotions;
- Probe further into what people saw, heard or felt;
- Suggest or imply that people may become unwell or suffer long-term effects;
- Minimise the incident or potential impact on some people;
- Delve into the details of the operational component and individual actions or decisions made (including individual emotional/behavioural) responses, when people may still be in shock or potentially traumatised; and
- Imply blame, identify errors, or reprimand people. Review of failures in response can occur at a separate distinct operational review, once some of the initial reaction and emotion have subsided.

Where there have been members or staff under the age of 18 involved in wellbeing information sessions, the team leader (patrol captain, lifeguard or UAV Team Leader) should also inform the parent of a young person's involvement.

PSOs will be able to access information on the Wellbeing Information Session by scanning the QR code on the keyring or business cards that they have been provided.

Well check - Delivery and Timeframes:

Following the group briefing, a well check is conducted with all members or staff either directly or indirectly involved in the critical incident. Well checks are conducted on a one-to-one basis and consists of:

- Assessment (observation) of how the person is presenting and appears to be coping; without actively prompting or encouraging the person to talk about what they saw, heard or experienced at the incident. Review of the person's support network. Confirm that there is someone available to provide support;
- Overview of coping mechanisms. How does the person usually cope and manage stress?;
- Provide education on identifying and reducing the shock response through:
 - ✓ Exercise to burn off the adrenalin
 - ✓ Controlled breathing to aid relaxation
 - ✓ Distraction to help settle the thoughts
- Options to get home. Consider safety and capacity to drive if visibly shaken and distressed;
- Overview of the support available from SLSNSW:
 - ✓ Sessions with a mental health provider through EAP (phone, face to face or video)
 - ✓ Written information and psychoeducation from SLSNSW
 - ✓ Resources available online through EAP
 - ✓ Regular follow-up over the first month post-incident
 - ✓ Internal psychosocial support through the Club and Patrol Captains and Peer Support Officers
- Next steps and expectations around further review and follow-up.

After an incident, each person will be contacted three times in the month following to identify any changing support needs. Well check 1 occurs not before 24 hours but within 72 hours, with face-to-face support or a call by the Peer Support Officer. If this is not possible, a call will be made by the SLSNSW Wellbeing Team.

Well check 2 occurs approximately one-week post-incident and Well check 3 occurs approximately one-month post-incident, observing for a complete return to pre-incident function. The purpose of the well checks is to provide Peer Support, information regarding common reactions to critical incidents, screen for any indications of distress, trauma or other concerning reactions e.g. interrupted sleep, intrusive thoughts, anxiety or hyperarousal and provide information on available supports. Members who experience these symptoms are encouraged to engage with professional support services such as the MAP/EAP.

Suggested scripts for the well checks are provided to PSOs and included in the Peer Support Officer Guide. These are some suggestions that may aid the person providing the well check and psychological first aid. They are suggestions only and it is important to find your own approach and style that feels natural and authentic, empathetic and focused on the person.

Referring for Professional Support

During a Peer Support conversation or during a well check, if the person you are supporting displays distress, emotional turmoil, difficulty engaging or appears not to be coping and adjusting, recommend/facilitate an appointment with the SLSNSW EAP provider. The EAP/MAP offers 24/7 support with counsellors who are trained in general mental health and Critical Incident Management. Emphasise the option to contact them anytime, including day, night, weekends, and public holidays, for assistance.

The [National Emergency Worker Support Scheme](#) is also a recommended resource which offers free and confidential mental health support including treatment for trauma including PTSD, for emergency service workers and volunteers.

Alternatively, members and staff may consult their GP for a Medicare referral to see a private psychologist. Direct booking with a psychologist is also an option, with the ability to claim expenses through private health insurance.

When addressing issues such as mental health, substance abuse, past traumatic experiences, or major life stressors, prompt recognition and referral are crucial. At all times during face to face and phone support with others, any concern for safety to yourself or others, including aggression, perceived risk of self harm and/or suicidal ideation, should be responded to immediately by obtaining additional support (so you are not alone with an at risk person), and calling 000 for Ambulance, Police and mental health crisis team assistance.



Confidentiality and Privacy

To ensure trust and confidence in the Peer Support Program, Peer Support work should be provided with strict confidentiality and privacy. The Wellbeing Officer/PSO training program will provide a detailed overview of the parameters of confidentiality and limits. Any conversations with a member/staff member should be treated as confidential unless there are concerns for the safety of the individual or others, or where the individual gives permission for the Wellbeing Officer/PSO to share relevant information to a third party.

Informed Consent

Informed consent is the granting of permission by an individual, to release their information to another party, based on having full knowledge of the possible consequences. Members/staff should have consent and confidentiality explained fully, before participating in the Well Check process or a Peer Support conversation. Breaches to confidentiality without informed consent must only occur in circumstances where there are serious concerns for the safety of the individual directly, or in relation to their capacity to undertake a role that impacts upon safety (of self or others). In these situations it is required to advise the person that you are seeking help and disclosing information for safety purposes, and to keep them informed.

Escalation Process/Breaching Confidentiality

Any uncertainty regarding confidentiality or concern for potential breaches must be escalated. The escalation process is to speak directly to the SLSNSW Wellbeing Team who will assist you with managing the individual's wellbeing and any mandatory or appropriate notifications with the support of external and professional advice and support. If there is immediate risk, please contact 000 first.

Fitness for Duties and Stand Down Procedure

Returning to or maintaining normal duties is usually a positive element in recovering following a critical incident or managing mental health concerns. If any club member, position holder or staff member has concerns around a member or staff's ability to perform their duties or their potential to cause harm to themselves or others either by action or inaction, it is recommended to raise your concern in confidence with the SLSNSW Wellbeing Team or your supervisor (eg Club Captain or Manager).

The Wellbeing Team may be consulted, and concerns may be discussed without identifying the member or staff in question. At all stages, the wellbeing of the individual and the rights and need for confidentiality will be weighed with the potential risk to other members, employees and/or the public. The Wellbeing Team will engage with skilled professional support to manage each individual concern. If found to be sufficient, an executive representative from the Club or SLSNSW will be approached (Preferably the President, Membership Manager or CEO) to discuss concerns with the member or staff and determine the best course of action. This may include a review of their volunteer engagement at various levels eg Club Patrol Captain, Club call out team member, Branch RWC Operator, a review of their current support network, and their fitness for duties and impact of participation on themselves and others.

Each concern will be managed by the Wellbeing Team in conjunction with external and skilled professionals as required, and a course of action will be undertaken with the member or employee, as participation in the process can be a very beneficial step.

Members and Staff may be directed to seek medical clearance or completion of a "Fitness for Duties" form before returning to normal duties in line with their employment contract or Surf Life Saving Australia Member Support Guideline.

Peer Support Officers do not have the authority to stand anyone one down. This decision may only be made in consultation with skilled professionals to ensure that Member Wellbeing remains as a priority and will form part of the individual's fitness for duties review.

Reporting, Record Keeping and Privacy

To ensure privacy and security of personal and/or sensitive information, Wellbeing Officers are not expected to keep any file notes or records of contact with members/staff.

PSOs are required to keep a record of contact/attempts for well checks and liaise with the SLSNSW Wellbeing Team, in accordance with the Critical Incident Response Framework. Records are not detailed and should not be extensive clinical records with a lot of personal information. They should be very brief, and it is recommended that a few basic notes be kept with the following information:

- Date of contact;
- One sentence on what was discussed or recommended; and
- Any agreed next steps eg: the next follow up date or referral to a professional or another service.

Consideration needs to be given towards the security of this information as it is personal and private. Accordingly, these records should only be maintained in the Wellbeing Team's database which is only accessible by the SLSNSW Wellbeing team (noting that no volunteers, senior leadership team or board members can access this information). Caution should be taken regarding the information that is shared via email being limited to contacts made/not made. Accurate records of well check dates and regular communication with the SLSNSW Wellbeing team whilst conducting checks, forms an important component of providing consistent and stable support to members who may be impacted by trauma, and allows for appropriate support of the PSO where required.

Conflicts of Interest

In some instances, it may not be appropriate for a certain person to complete the well check with the member/staff. Examples of this include:

- When the parties are family members;
- When the parties are in a romantic relationship with each other;
- When the parties are close friends;
- If there is a history of conflict or interpersonal difficulty;
- When the recipient of the well check indicates they are not comfortable with the involved PSO.

In these instances, the member or staff should be linked in with an alternate person or the SLSNSW Wellbeing Team for the well check. Where this is not practicable, they may consider completing the initial well check and then handing over future well checks to the SLSNSW Wellbeing Team.

Working with Children and Young People

Surf Life Saving (SLS) is committed to ensuring the safety and wellbeing of all Children and Young People (CYP) who are involved in SLS. Please refer to the [Child Safe Guidelines](#) for further information on working with Children and Young People.

Informed Consent, Confidentiality and Parental Involvement for Children and Young People

It is SLSNSW standard policy to seek parental consent prior to engaging in a well check conversation with a young person. In many instances it may be appropriate to conduct the well check with the parent of the young person. Young people should also be assessed for their capacity to give informed consent. Young people, like adults, should be afforded the right to confidentiality. An important aspect of informed consent is ensuring individuals are aware of limits of confidentiality. In general, safety always overrides confidentiality. If it is believed there is a risk of harm to anyone based on information provided by a young person, this information can be disclosed to the relevant parties. These matters are covered in more detail during the Wellbeing Officer and PSO training.



Training of Wellbeing Officers

Recruitment process – Peer Support Officers

Wellbeing Officers (previously referred to as Club Peer Supporters) focus on promoting wellbeing and providing support within their local club community. They encourage early help-seeking behaviours and offer personal and club-related support within the regular club activities.

Step 1: Promotion

Expressions of interest will be sought around June/July each year, communicated via the Wellbeing Team to branches, clubs and members.

Step 2: Expression of Interest

All Expressions of Interest (EOI) to be submitted online. The Expression of Interest will ask Members/staff to:

- Explain why they would like to be a Wellbeing Officer;
- Share a short overview of their experience within Surf Life Saving, focusing primarily on their current role for staff or lifesaving for members (e.g. patrolling, emergency call out, support operations) and member/staff engagement/Wellbeing experience;
- Describe any relevant experience, skills, or qualifications they have that would make them suitable to be a Wellbeing Officer; and
- Complete the self-reflection checklist and confirm their ability to commit to key functions of the Wellbeing Officer role.

Step 3: Training

Candidates will be invited to attend virtual Psychological First Aid Training. The focus of the training will be understanding the principles of Psychological First Aid and how to support others within surf life saving. Ongoing engagement and support will also be provided throughout the year. It is recommended that Wellbeing Officers complete the SLSA Child Safe Awareness online course within 1 month of their appointment. This can be accessed through Members Area e-Learning.

Step 4: Club President/SLSNSW Manager (for SLSNSW Employees) Endorsement

The Wellbeing Team will then consult with Club Presidents/SLSNSW Manager providing them with an opportunity to provide feedback regarding suitability and capacity. Candidates will then be notified of the outcome of their application.

Step 5: Appointment

Once the Psychological First Aid Training has been completed, members are encouraged to contact their club leader (Club Captain, President or MPIO) to determine the best way to support the club and members. It may be appropriate for new Wellbeing Officers to be paired other skilled members within the club, branch or SLSNSW. Peer Support Officers may also seek guidance/support from the Wellbeing Team and/or the MAP/EAP.

Recruitment Process – Branch Peer Support Officers

Step 1: Promotion

Expressions of interest will be sought in June/July from suitably qualified candidates.

Step 2: Expression of Interest

All expressions of interest to be submitted online. The Expression of Interest will ask members to:

- Explain why they would like to be a Peer Support Officer;
- Share a short overview of their experience within Surf Life Saving, focusing primarily on their lifesaving (e.g. patrolling, emergency call out, support operations) and member engagement/wellbeing experience;
- Describe any relevant experience, skills, or qualifications they have that would make them suitable to be a PSO (applicants with lived experience or who have a personal experience utilising mental health supports are welcomed and encouraged to share); Describe their previous experience supporting peers and list any relevant mental health (or related discipline) qualifications or experience;
- Confirm their ability to commit to key functions of the PSO role, including their ability to attend critical incidents as required; and
- Describe their other commitments within Surf Lifesaving.



Step 3: Shortlisting

Candidates will be shortlisted by the Wellbeing Team based on the number of volunteer positions required and relevance of responses on the EOI to Essential and Desired Skills/Knowledge for the PSO position.

Step 4: Screening process

Shortlisted candidates will be invited to attend a virtual screening for this role. The State Director of Life Saving will appoint suitable interviewer/s that may include a SLSNSW Wellbeing Team representative, another appropriate SLSNSW representative or an external consultancy representative. The virtual screening aims to determine the candidate's understanding of the role, relevant capabilities and suitability to participate in the Peer Support Program. It is acknowledged that training will be provided so candidates are not expected to have all the skills and knowledge outlined in the position descriptions.

Step 5: Endorsement

The Wellbeing Team will then consult with the Member's Branch Director of Lifesaving, providing them with an opportunity to provide feedback regarding suitability and capacity. Candidates will then be notified of the outcome of their application and screening process.

Step 6: Training

Successful candidates will be invited to attend Peer Support Officer Training. This may be in-person, hybrid or virtual delivery. The focus of the training will be understanding the SLSNSW Critical Incident Response Framework, the Role & Responsibilities of Wellbeing and Peer Support Officers, understanding the trauma response, identifying signs and symptoms of psychological distress, principles of Psychological First Aid and difficult conversations (responding to risk). Refresher training and other relevant training may also be provided.

Peer Support Officers will also be required to complete Psychological First Aid Training prior to attending the Peer Support Officer Training. Peer Support Officers are asked to complete the SLSA Child Safe Awareness online course within 1 month of their appointment. This can be accessed through Members Area e-Learning.

Step 7: Appointment

Once the Peer Support Officer Training has been completed, successful applications will be officially appointed to the Peer Support Officer roles. Peer Support Officers may also seek guidance/support from the SLSNSW Wellbeing Team, request a peer mentor from the existing team, and/or the MAP. Once the initial two-year term expires, PSOs will be invited to opt in/out.

Step 8: Rostering

Rostering of PSOs will be managed by branches and submitted to the SOC via the weekly Branch Briefing Document. Branch Directors of Lifesaving and trained Peer Support Officers are to meet prior to season start to arrange suitable rostering, noting that branches will have varying Peer Support Officer numbers. PSOs should advise the Branch Director of Lifesaving of any unavailability to ensure sufficient coverage

PSOs should not self-activate, and all taskings should come via the SOC. Under extenuating circumstances, PSOs may also be requested to attend onsite at neighbouring Branch locations and/or provide remote support for other Branches across the state.

At all times, PSOs are expected to prioritise their own self care and wellbeing, and notify the Wellbeing Team or appropriate supervisor if they feel unsafe or unable (due to factors such as fatigue, personal stressors, training deficiency), to complete their rostering or taskings. This may include self-identifying a need to take leave from the role, seek supervision/EAP support, or other practical adjustment to support their ongoing role. The Wellbeing team may at any time, assess the fitness for duty of a peer and engage in process to appropriately support the member.

When activated to provide support at an incident, PSOs should remain cognisant of their responsibility to maintain safety and aware of their legal obligations. PSOs should not rush to attend an incident, and it is reasonably expected that they may have a delayed attendance.



Ongoing Professional Development

PSOs and Wellbeing Officers may be requested to attend ongoing learning and development opportunities to ensure a continuing high standard of support provided to members. Ongoing professional development may include:

- Updates to Wellbeing and Peer Support Program and/or Critical Incident model
- Refresher training in Psychological First Aid
- Suicide awareness and prevention
- Understanding Vicarious Trauma
- Participation in Well checks and/or supervision

Any additional training will be coordinated by the Wellbeing Team and may be delivered face to face or virtually.

Termination

The term of a PSO will expire every two years, at which point the member/staff can re-apply and complete re-accreditation training. The SLSNSW Wellbeing team, in consultation with Clubs and/or Branches, may terminate or suspend an individual's involvement in the Wellbeing Officer and PSO roles if there are concerns regarding suitability, current physical or cognitive capacity to deliver support, conflicts with other commitments at Surf Lifesaving, where there are conduct issues or concerns relating to unethical behaviour/ unjustified breaches of confidentiality or privacy.