



VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

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PILOT EXTENDED

VFBV welcomes the extension of the State Government's Provisional Payment pilot, which has been extended to June 30th 2021.

The pilot program allows CFA volunteers to access reimbursement for medical treatment and services while their compensation claim is being assessed and for a period of up to 13 weeks in the event their claim is rejected. The pilot is being offered to not only CFA members, but Victoria Police, Ambulance Victoria, FRV, ESTA, DELWP and other emergency related public sector volunteers and employees including registered nurses.

Good engagement with VFBV and CFA volunteers was established early in the pilot with former Minister for Workplace Safety, the Hon. Jill Hennessy MP engaging with us early and encouraging our participation on the pilots steering group.

VFBV is represented on the Governments Pilot Steering Committee by CEO Adam Barnett who reports good progress with wide collaboration between the agencies, departments and stakeholders involved.

The intent of the pilot is to transition to permanent and ongoing arrangements with legislative changes having now passed Parliament. VFBV is advocating strongly to government and CFA to ensure the same arrangements are mirrored in the CFA Regulations to ensure no gap in coverage for CFA volunteers covered by CFA volunteer compensation.

VFBV encourages any member who may be experiencing a mental health injury or trauma such as PTSD, depression or anxiety that has been caused by CFA service to make contact with the CFA wellbeing team on 1800-959-232, and consider accessing the provisional payments pilot. A claim form is available from your CFA District Office, and VFBV has requested the forms also be made available online. Any members having difficulty accessing the pilot should make contact with a VFBV State Councillor or Support Officer for priority assistance.

Nominations for Trust Fund

The VFBV Board is calling for nominations to the CFA and Brigades Donations Trust Fund.

Following nominations, five new or reappointed members will be appointed by the VFBV Board to serve as VFBV trustees on the Trust Fund for a term of two years. The Trust Fund committee normally meets quarterly, either via teleconference or at CFA HQ.

Nominations close Friday 11th June 2021 and can be mailed to VFBV office, 9/24 Lakeside Drive, Burwood East 3151 or emailed to vfbv@vfbv.com.au

2021 State Championships approaches

Time is fast approaching for the State Championships at Mooropna later this month – the Urban Juniors on the weekend of 20th and 21st March, and the much anticipated event on the weekend of 27th and 28th March which will showcase the Urban Seniors and the Rural Seniors & Rural Juniors being conducted simultaneously alongside each other at the same venue, for the first time in competition history.

Numbers of teams are down this year as expected, primarily due to COVID delaying the commencement of training and competitions being held, but numbers are still good with so far 41 teams entered to compete at the Urban Juniors on the 20th and 21st March and, in total, 87 Senior teams and 33 Junior teams entered to compete the weekend of 27th and 28th March.

The State Championships Committee, which consists of CFA management, members of both VFBV Rural and Urban State Committees and staff, has worked extremely hard in all the preplanning, preparation and management for these events, to which has been added an extra workload in ensuring the events comply with the Government's COVID-Safe requirements, and VFBV thanks all those involved for their contribution and efforts.

STAY CONNECTED AND INVOLVED

by Adam Barnett, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

It is normally this time of year that I reflect on the current Fire Season as we enter the home stretch of our summer fire danger period.

And while it has been milder, I want to acknowledge the significant contribution many of you have made over recent months and will continue to make. Thank-you for your service, dedication and stewardship of our communities safety.

And while a milder season infers a slower tempo, one only needs to look at how COVID-19 has impacted on many of the everyday things we once took for granted to appreciate the extra workload that brigades, and groups have had to contend with. It is a testimony to your ability to adapt with a minimum of fuss that speaks measures about CFA volunteers dedication to public safety and their desire to just get on with it. Well done and thank-you.

NEW CFA CEO

Over recent weeks we have formally welcomed Natalie MacDonald as CFA's new Chief Executive Officer, who took over from Acting CEO Cath Greaves at the end of February.

Natalie comes to us from La Trobe University where she was the Vice-President of Strategy and Development. She has also previously worked as Director-General of the Queensland Government's Department of Housing and Public Works and

worked for the Queensland Ambulance Service as head of Corporate development.

On behalf of the VFBV Board, State Council and members I welcome Natalie to the role and commit on behalf of the whole VFBV family that we will provide her our full support.

I along with many of you want to see a strong CFA, one that is ready and stepping up to lead the work that needs to be done to reaffirm the critical role that CFA plays in our communities. A proudly volunteer service, that is deeply connected to our communities and capably supported by its dedicated, passionate and committed staff.

I want to acknowledge that for many, this will feel like yet just another change on the revolving door of CFA leadership over recent years that has contributed to low morale, change fatigue and widespread instability within the organisation.

Conversely, I hasten to add that a new leadership team selected to suit the changed environment may yet be a strength, and we should embrace the fact that this finally draws a line under all the temporary senior leadership positions filled only in an acting capacity for far too long. Over recent months we have seen the permanent appointment of a new CFA Chair, CEO and Chief Officer.

My hope is that this now brings much needed stability and sets the organisation up for success. And as I have previously stated, I have been impressed so far by CFA's new Chair Greg Wilson, and our new Chief Officer Jason Heffernan, and my hope is that these appointments signal that CFA is moving from strength to strength, and determinedly moving forward and pivoting to the changed environment.

To add to my optimism, my first interactions with Natalie have been exceptionally good, and I have been deeply impressed by her approach, questions, and desire to understand not just what makes CFA tick (or not) but also seeking to understand the how and why.

My first impression is of someone who shares with us a deep love and connection to our communities, understands that CFA is a 'people' organisation, the importance of our front line and the critical importance of our brigades and the need to support them to be the best they can be.

I also commend her first priority was to start visiting brigades and join the Chief on his early tours across the State which again emphasises the importance of our people and how we deliver our services at the coal face within our communities.

This all bodes well, and I am looking forward to continuing to work with Natalie as she settles in.

THANK-YOU

I also want to take this opportunity to say a public thank-you to Cath Greaves

who was CFA's Acting CEO since June last year. In a short period of time, she won both my respect and admiration for her vision and the transformation journey to pivot corporate CFA to its changed operating environment.

Her commitment to ensuring volunteers were reintegrated into the organisation's leadership DNA was outstanding. Her work to have their voices present in all leadership discussions was both refreshing and inspirational. And her commitment to start rebuilding the consultative arrangements between CFA and the association will be critical to ensuring the CFA leadership is connected to the dreams and aspirations of CFA volunteers and better positions the executive to actively fix and resolve the many issues that challenge us.

Cath made me a promise when she first started, and that was that she didn't want to be a seat warmer and wanted to make every day count. And when I asked why she took on the role, she told me how much she had admired CFA for a long time, and she too wanted to make a difference.

I have no hesitation in affirming to each of you that in my mind - she did exactly that, and I have been very supportive of the work she has done, and deeply admire the passion and commitment she made to try and make CFA the best it possibly can.

My only disappointment is she will not see the benefits of what she has started. But I am buoyed by the final paragraphs in her farewell message to the membership which said:

"CFA is about to enter into its most rewarding phase yet, and I am incredibly excited about what will be achieved under Natalie and Jason's collective leadership."

"I shall miss you all, and CFA greatly, however I will always carry part of this great organisation with me. I will delight in looking in from the sidelines to see CFA flourish – to become the exemplar of a community-based, volunteer emergency service where members work together for the protection of our community. Thank you all for your extraordinary commitment and support."

And while I shall miss Cath and wish her every success, I similarly feel positive about the next steps ahead of us. I say this to provide you some confidence that I think some really good ground work has been laid and we don't start with Natalie from a blank sheet of paper.

For those of you tired of the changes, stick in there and lean on those of us who still have enough energy and enthusiasm for another lap. It's only natural there will be peaks and troughs in what for many of you is a lifelong commitment to an organisation that literally changes people's lives. Remember why you joined and keep your heads up.

CHILD SAFETY

And thank-you to all members, brigades, groups and district councils that contributed to feedback on CFA's pro-



posed child safety policies and procedures.

There was a high level of support and consensus for the majority of proposed changes, with an overwhelming majority of support for the introduction of mandatory working with children checks for all new CFA volunteers and staff.

VFBV has provided CFA with comprehensive feedback based on your input. And the VFBV Board has reinforced that it shares with CFA a commitment to child safety and ensuring the child safe standards and principles are embedded across the whole organisation.

There were two aspects of the changes that received overwhelming negative feedback and criticism from volunteers, and which the VFBV Board has agreed to campaign for change.

The first is that VFBV categorically rejects the proposed exclusion of FRV seconded personnel from needing to comply with the new working with children check procedure. And while we acknowledge the difficult industrial relations environment present, volunteers were adamant that CFA has a moral as well as a legal responsibility to pursue other means of achieving organisation-wide child safe policies to protect our children in line with the relevant child safe legislation.

VFBV has also not supported the proposed procedure to deal with adverse notices, echoing the concerns raised by volunteers about the lack of confidence in CFA's existing privacy and confidentiality processes, but also raising concerns with the lack of procedural fairness. Child safety is too important to let potential administrative error undermine people's confidence, and are issues we pledge our full attention to resolving.

In welcome developments, CFA has agreed to a VFBV request to form a small working party to work together on a revised procedure that addresses these shortfalls and provides a foundation for a new draft procedure to further consult on.

This demonstrates our approach and commitment in always trying to work positively with CFA in the first instance to influence change, and I am hopeful that CFA's fast acknowledgment and offer to work further with us to adapt their draft policies and procedures based on volunteer feedback is a sign of positive things to come.

Stay safe and keep connecting and being involved.

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More than 1,000 VFBV subscribers now receive this page via direct email. You can sign up to receive this information, VFBV's popular Two Minute Briefing from the VFBV/CFA Joint Committees and other information direct to your personal email.

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