



VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

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AFFILIATION

Thanks to all those brigades who paid their fees prior to 31st July and were automatically entered into the draw to win prizes donated by GAAM Emergency Products and Powdersafe. Winning brigades/groups will be announced in the next edition!

The number of brigades affiliating with VFBV for 2022/23 is on track to match record numbers of the past five years, a sign of continued support for VFBV's work on behalf of all CFA volunteers.

Remember, by affiliating you are making a vital contribution to the important work

we do on behalf of all CFA volunteers. Advocacy, support and the provision of trusted and credible advice are all strengthened when members work together and share a unity of purpose.

If you are not sure whether your Brigade or Group's VFBV Welfare Fund subscription are up to date, please contact your Secretary urgently, as we encourage all those who have not yet affiliated to do so as soon as possible.

For any enquiries, contact your VFBV Support Officer, State Councillor or call us at the office on 03 98861141.

Chief officer's minimum requirements

VFBV is seeking brigade, group and individual feedback from volunteers on the Chief Officer's minimum requirements for operational response.

The CFA Chief Officer has invited VFBV to make submission on the ongoing application of the Chief Officer's minimum requirements to participate in fireground operations which are currently: General Firefighter (or minimum skills for those who predate GFF); the annual entrapment drill (SOP 9.32); and the three yearly tree hazard awareness certification.

Volunteers are also encouraged to attend VFBV District Council meetings in order to hear the perspectives of others in your local district.

Further details on how to make a submission are available on the VFBV website or through your local District Council or VFBV Support Officer. Responses are due no later than Monday 12th September.

CFA BOARD

VFBV welcomes the appointment of three new Board members to the CFA Board. The two new Government nominees are Tony Peake and Rachel Thomson who replace Dr Gillian Sparkes and Simon Weir.

VFBV is also pleased to see Ross Coyle AFSM returning to the Board as a volunteer nominee, replacing Kent Griffin who choose not to seek renomination.

VFBV congratulates all new board members and offers our sincere thanks to the outgoing board members for their service, with particular thanks to Kent Griffin who joined the board in 2019.

Financial Reporting reminder

A reminder to brigades and groups that their end of financial year reporting requirements to CFA are due. Cash and investment balances as at 30 June were due no later than 1 August, and financial statements are due no later than 31 December 2022.

The new online platform that launched on 1 July of this year has been very popular, with the new platform providing an electronic option for those that would prefer to upload the documents via an online portal.

The new portal is opt-in and brigades/groups may still use paper forms and submission should they still prefer. To

Budget reallocation

VFBV congratulates CFA on the recent announcement that end of financial year corporate budget savings and reallocations has resulted in an extra \$2.8 million dollars being reallocated to fund additional service delivery initiatives to benefit brigades and groups.

Under this initiative, each Group will receive a multi-purpose Thermal Imaging Camera (3MV320) to support both bushfire and structural settings, as well as a Kestral Fire Weather Meter 5500 which enhances groups capability to monitor local weather and fire conditions.

Rescue brigades are also receiving 50T lift jacks that will enhance their operational rescue capability.

VFBV believe this shows a renewed commitment by CFA to maximise CFA funding and supporting brigades and members through direct investment in equipment that enhances our capability and protects our communities. VFBV congratulates the CFA CEO and CO on these initiatives.

access the online portal, as well as templates for financial reporting, members can access the brigade finance page via Members Online.

Log in to members.cfa.vic.gov.au, and select "Finance Documents and Templates" from the "Policy and Procedure" drop down menu at the top of the page.

Fire Medical Response

by Adam Barnett, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

After long advocacy by VFBV, I welcome the recent CFA and Government announcements concerning the establishment of the Fire Medical Response (FMR) program across 50 locations across Victoria.

This program will continue the proud tradition of the Emergency Medical Response (EMR) program that has been operating within CFA since 2008 and saw CFA partnered with Ambulance Victoria to simultaneously dispatch a brigade along with an ambulance for specific medical emergencies requiring early interventions such as CPR and defibrillation, and where fire brigade response was predicted to be faster than Ambulance Victoria response.

These programs recognise that for every minute that CPR and defibrillation is delayed, a person's survivability from cardiac arrest reduces by 10 percent.

It would be an understatement to say the introduction of medical response to CFA has been a long and challenging road.

EMR was first introduced to the Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB) as a pilot back in 1998 and was formally adopted and introduced in 2001.

In early 2008, CFA received funding and approval to conduct a medical response pilot across 10 CFA locations. Five fully volunteer locations and five integrated locations.

VFBV supported the program from inception and worked closely with the pilot brigades to ensure the program was safe, effective and sustainable.

In February 2008 the five fully volunteer locations commenced the program, however the five integrated locations were prevented from participating due to a grievance lodged by the UFU preventing career firefighters from participating. It would be another three years for these disputes to be resolved. The five integrated locations joined the pilot on 25 September 2011.

With 10 brigades now fully online and participating, a formal 12-month evaluation of the program was finally able to be conducted between September 2011 and September 2012.

The results of the pilot demonstrated a valuable collaboration between Ambulance Victoria and CFA and observed significant improved response times to EMR eligible events across the pilot areas, as well as a corresponding trend towards

increased survival for patients who were defibrillated by CFA crews.

In 2014, Ambulance Victoria conducted a detailed analysis of AV response to cardiac arrests and identified a further 156 CFA priority locations across Victoria that it felt would provide improved patient outcomes after considering the number of EMR events and response time differentials between CFA and AV. CFA then sought expert independent analysis to model a five-year wider rollout across the 156 identified locations.

The independent analysis modelled the financial impacts of an expanded EMR program and confirmed that it cost 85% less per volunteer brigade to rollout EMR when compared to an integrated location and the vast majority of priority locations were serviced by fully volunteer brigades.

Therefore, VFBV was surprised when in May 2015 the Victorian Government announced that it would only be expanding EMR to CFA's career staff at integrated locations.

VFBV continued its advocacy and raised it's concerns with Government and CFA. For example we used the decisions surrounding EMR's introduction to CFA as a case study in our 2015 submission to the Victorian Government's fire services review.

VFBV continued to advocate for the support and expansion of medical response, long before the pandemic squeezed our health services. I certainly wish to thank all brigades, members and other stakeholders, including individual MPs who have raised the issue and contributed to this work over the years.

To have the program finally endorsed and funded is a wonderful result not just for CFA but for the wider Victorian community. Given CFA has the largest geographic footprint of any emergency service in Victoria this program will result in significantly improved community safety outcomes. I also wish to thank and acknowledge the support of Emergency Services Minister the Hon. Jaclyn Symes MP who has recently approved the programs expansion.

In early discussions we have requested that CFA work with us to develop a comprehensive informed decision-making model that clearly outlines the additional commitments of taking on FMR, as well as the likely impacts both positive and negative.

And while all brigades no doubt want to support their communities in times of need, our statutory obligations of ensuring our brigades are available for fire response must remain a priority. This may mean some locations may not be suitable for additional services until other capabilities are further enhanced and the model will be an opt-in one to ensure brigades are supportive and willing to take on the additional responsibilities.

Given the limited funding of \$3.9 million is available to expand the program to 50 locations across the State, it is also important that decisions on locations are informed by Ambulance Victoria priorities. While we will continue to advocate for the program to be expanded, like all programs that have limited funding we will need to ensure the first 50 locations will provide maximum benefit from scarce public funds.

As it is also envisaged that FMR will be developed to support regional and rural locations in addition to metropolitan areas, there will need to be careful consideration of how longer AV response times in regional areas will impact on the program and responding crews.

In this regard, VFBV has requested that CFA adopt a highly consultative model similar to how the original CFA EMR program was developed to ensure the FMR program is developed in partnership with brigades. VFBV already has proven success in this area and is looking forward to the establishment of strong formal consultative mechanisms and a collaborative and constructive approach between the agencies and stakeholders.

In addition, VFBV has also requested and received from CFA an assurance that the roll-out of FMR will in no way impact upon the current EMR program that is still operated by seven existing CFA brigades. CFA has committed to VFBV that status quo of the CFA EMR program will be maintained while FMR is developed and no changes will be proposed without further consultation. This should provide peace of mind for those brigades that are concerned of any negative impacts to the existing program.

All in all, the introduction of fire medical response is a positive development and is sure to be embraced by many across the state. While the program is in its early consultative stages, I would urge brigades to be patient while the introductory work is undertaken.

I also use these developments as a further example of volunteer resilience and persistence to the ultimate benefit of our communities. The expansion of the program has not come easily or quickly but despite setbacks is not something we have ever given up on.

This follows the long advocacy by VFBV for defibrillators to be rolled out to all brigades and primary appliances across the state for the safety of firefighters and all those on the fireground. This



goal has finally been achieved with the CFA Donations Trust recently overseeing the provision of a further 1,137 defibrillators and the CFA Public Fund partnering with the Trust to fund the ongoing maintenance of all brigade defibs into the future. And while I'm disappointed that this program has had to be funded through community donations – I am exceptionally pleased to finally see defibs in all brigades finally a reality.

I urge members to embrace our collective successes as we continue to identify and prioritise areas of focus and continue to work on improving community outcomes. Things can move so slowly within our sector that is more important than ever to acknowledge and celebrate the good.

In other news, discussions are also continuing between CFA and VFBV on introducing the ability for brigades to accept tap and go payments for fundraising. Restrictive policies that have prevented brigades from being able to accept electronic donations and payments has long been a key frustration raised by brigades, with the need for new COVID safe practices only reinforcing the need for alternatives to cash.

Following the attendance of CFA's new Group General Manager Strategic Services Robyn Harris and CFA CEO Natalie MacDonald to VFBV State Council in December 2021, I have witnessed CFA embarking on renewed efforts to resolve this long standing issue. My recent discussions with CFA's new Chief Financial Officer Greg Forck have confirmed pleasing progress, and I believe announcements will be made shortly once some final arrangements are finalised.

I also wish to remind members that there are several topics open for feedback at the moment, and we are seeking volunteer involvement and feedback on some important operating procedures, as well as the chief officers' minimum requirements amongst others.

This year is also the tenth anniversary of the highly successful VFBV Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency survey and we are inviting any suggestions or feedback on how the survey may be improved or adapted. While we have enjoyed the benefits of a stable base line of questions and topics that allow for long term trend analysis, we also want the annual survey to be contemporary and relevant to members and decision makers alike. So, if you have any suggestions, please raise these with your VFBV State Councillor or Support Officer.

Stay involved, continue contributing and hold your heads high. Keep up the good work.

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