

Questions taken on notice and further information agreed to be supplied at the hearings

Portfolio:	Workplace Safety
Witness:	Ms Jill Hennessy
Committee member:	Mr Danny O'Brien
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Relevant text:

Mr D O'BRIEN: Minister, WorkSafe has provided \$40 000 to the ETU to undertake blood testing of Esso workers for PFAS contamination. Why is that being done against the advice of both state and federal health departments that blood testing is not necessary?

Ms HENNESSY: I will have to take that on notice, Mr O'Brien. WorkSafe provides funding to a range of employer and employee organisations around occupational health and safety issues. I am not aware of the advice. I am aware of some of the PFAS issues and debates, but I will have to take that on notice.

Ms HENNESSY: If Ms Amies is able to provide any other illumination—but I suppose I feel cautious about your assertion that it is against the advice of the state and federal health departments. I do not know that to be true, so with that caution I do not necessarily dispute what you say, but that is really the reason why I asked for the opportunity to be able to provide a response on notice.

Answer:

WorkSafe is funding limited one-off blood tests consistent with the voluntary Federal Government scheme. The purpose of the blood testing program is to provide current and former Esso Longford workers the same access to a blood testing program as workers in Australia's defence forces and emergency services personnel, such as the Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB). The testing program has been modelled from the existing program in place at the MFB, which is based on the voluntary Federal Government scheme.

The primary aim of the program is to provide workers with information about PFAS levels in their blood and how this compares with the general population, for workers that wish to know.

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Relevant text:

Mr D O'BRIEN: Could I ask on notice for a list of all the grants that WorkSafe has provided in the last 12 months?

Ms HENNESSY: We absolutely will provide you with that where it is appropriate to do so.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Thank you. And the process that they went through to provide those grants.

Answer:

WorkSafe provides funding and programs to support external stakeholders such as employee organisations, employer organisations, and small and medium sized businesses, to promote workplace safety and prevention.

WorkSafe complies with a number of processes in allocating grants. This includes the Assistant Treasurer's Standing Directions 2018 under the *Financial Management Act 1994*, that sets the standard for financial management for Victorian Government agencies. WorkSafe complies with Direction 4.2.2 that provides the investment principles for discretionary grants that guide agencies and have been endorsed by the Victorian Government.

In 2017/18, WorkSafe continued to financially support a number of initiatives designed to improve workplace health and safety including:

Funding to improve workplace health and safety	Organisation
Stakeholder support	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funding to assist workplaces relying on quad bikes to upgrade the equipment with roll-over protection or to purchase alternative work vehicles 	Vic Farmers Fed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funding to assist the agricultural industry to design a farm safety campaign that effectively challenges the way farmers view and engage with farm health and safety 	Vic Farmers Fed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personnel to coordinate and engage on OHS issues on behalf of key employee and employer representative organisations 	VTHC
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grant funding to the Gippsland Asbestos and Related Diseases Support/Asbestos Council of Victoria to provide support and advocacy for people in the Latrobe Valley affected by asbestos 	GARDS (Gippsland Asbestos Related Diseases Support Inc)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grants to support programs to improve safety for workers with a focus on workplace bullying, young worker safety and women's rights in the workplace particularly with respect to 	VTHC

Funding to improve workplace health and safety	Organisation
Stakeholder support	
domestic violence and its impact on a woman's ability to attend the workplace	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grant funding to support the Arts Wellbeing Collective pilot program, an Arts Centre Melbourne initiative, delivered in partnership with Entertainment Assist. This initiative involves a consortium of Victorian arts and cultural organisations whose shared vision is better mental health and wellbeing for Victorian performing arts workers 	Victorian Arts Centre Trust
Small-medium employer support	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The OHS Essentials Program provides free, independent OHS consultancy services to assist small and medium businesses (fewer than 200 employees) to improve safety and assist compliance with OHS legislation 	VCCI
Injury prevention funds	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> WorkSafe provided funding to the Victorian Trades Hall Council for the OHSReps@Work website (ohsrep.org.au), which provides important guidance and support to OHS health and safety representatives 	VTHC
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> WorkSafe provided funding to undertake safety related research and deliver applied industry-relevant research to support the program's safety vision and objectives 	Department of Economic Develop, Jobs, Trans and Resources (DEJTR)

Funding to improve workplace health and safety	Total Amount
Employee Representative Groups	\$2,114,000
Employer Representative Group	\$2,124,000

In 2018/19, WorkSafe also supported through the WorkSafe WorkWell (WorkWell) program a number of initiatives designed to improve workplace health and safety. Organisations submit an application through an open process and are assessed by an Evaluation Committee and competitively reviewed in line with the eligibility criteria and assessment criteria.

WorkSafe, in partnership with the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), launched the WorkWell program on 11 April 2017. The WorkWell program has allocated \$17 million over five years towards the WorkWell Mental Health Improvement Fund to promote mental health and wellbeing and prevent mental injury and illness amongst vulnerable populations in Victorian workplaces. The 11 projects funded in the first two rounds are outlined below:

Round One (Oct 2018)	
Name	Project outcomes
Arts Centre Melbourne	Improve support services for Victorian arts workers, collate and share information, effect industry cultural change, improve support networks within and between arts organisations.

Round One (Oct 2018)	
Name	Project outcomes
Centre of Perinatal Excellence	Building individual and organisational capacity to understand the nature of the perinatal transition for workers, whilst piloting organisational level interventions to help create a supportive workplace environment.
Gippsland Women's Health	The Working Well in Wellington project will test and identify a range of positive mental health strategies for shift workers in the Wellington Shire. The project will particularly focus on strategies that can be implemented in a regional setting. The outcomes of the project, including evaluation of strategies and commentary on resources used, will be developed into a resource kit that will be available to all employers in Victoria.
Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry	Focussing on small to medium-sized businesses who employ a significant number of young workers (under 25), the comprehensive program will help employers better understand mental health risks and improve their workplace practices to prevent harm, educate and support their workforce.
SuperFriend	Creating Thriving Contact Centres is an innovative pilot project aiming to protect and promote the mental health and wellbeing of Victorian contact centre workers by improving their job satisfaction and job engagement. Findings will help inform development of similar programs for contact centre workers in the financial and insurances services industry.
Round Two (Jan 2019)	
Australian Super	Protect and promote the mental health and wellbeing of ageing workers in the public transport industry. This will be achieved through the delivery of resources and advice to a pilot group of Victorian workplaces and their employees. The learnings of the project will be shared with over 100,000 Victorian businesses using the Australian Super network.
Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU)	Vicarious Trauma is an occupational challenge for many Victorian Government Departments. CPSU will work in partnership with the Departments of Justice and Community Safety and Health and Human Services, on a project to develop customised resources that provide knowledge and skills for government departments to address the trauma needs of staff, and create supportive trauma informed workplaces.
CYP (Cross Yarra Partnership) Design & Construction	Targeting the construction industry to address mental health and reshape the culture of construction by targeting connection, belonging, respect and support. A technology platform will host resources for employees and managers, and facilitate communication amongst the workforce reducing isolation and increasing the sense of belonging.
Peninsula Health	The 'We Care' project will take a multifaceted approach by focussing on increasing knowledge and competencies within each organisation for individuals, managers and executives to prevent, identify and manage mental health injuries and illnesses within the workplace. All knowledge and resources will be shared across this group of more than 80,000 health workers.
Prevention United	The Wellbeing Track and Change project aims to improve the mental health and wellbeing of frontline workers in residential aged care services. The project will focus on staff and management working in Ballarat Health Services's 10 residential aged care facilities which collectively employ over 500 staff.
Smiling Mind	Smiling Mind will work with Victorian primary school principals and deputy principals to take a system-level approach to collaboratively improve school

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Round One (Oct 2018)	
Name	Project outcomes
	culture and climate and enhance workplace protective factors associated with principal wellbeing and mental health.

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Relevant text:

Mr HIBBINS: Just picking up on that assurance that the financial arrangements that you have made in this budget will not impact on your statutory obligations, I note from the 2018 WorkSafe annual report comments regarding the challenge of an increase in more complex injuries, including mental injuries, together with the continuing challenge of common-law applications continuing to pose a risk to the financial viability of the workplace scheme. Can I ask how that is being addressed?

Ms HENNESSY: Yes, and I will ask Clare, but those issues are the ones that the board of WorkSafe as an independent statutory authority monitor and manage as part of business as usual. The issue around complex claims, one of the great challenges that we have, goes to return to work. Return to work for people, particularly those with mental injury, is very, very challenging, because of course people do not want to go back necessarily to the source of occupational experience that potentially injured them in the first place. Complex claims, again, are another great challenge for us, and I might invite Ms Amies to speak to what steps WorkSafe are taking in order for us to be more effective at that, and by effective I do not mean managing these people out of the system; I mean effective rehabilitation, better return-to-work experiences.

The CHAIR: Minister, I am not going to be able to allow that to happen. You will have to take that on notice, my apologies, because we have come to the end of your portfolio time before us.

Answer:

WorkSafe recognises the challenges facing the workcover scheme and are moving forward with a strategic direction that addresses these challenges by significantly strengthening prevention activity and drive long-lasting improvements in workplace health, safety and wellbeing. However, the workcover scheme does remain financially sound, with the accounting funding ratio at 123%; above the target range of 82.5% - 117.5%.

Mental health and wellbeing is a growing concern in Victorian workplaces, with mental injury claims on the rise. In partnership with the Department of Health and Human Services, WorkSafe has developed the WorkWell program, which aims to make mental health and wellbeing a priority in the workplace.

Funding opportunities are available under the WorkWell Mental Health Improvement Fund. The fund supports large-scale programs that aim to promote mental health and wellbeing as well as prevent mental injury and illness among vulnerable Victorian workers. The focus is currently on young and older workers, frontline workers and industries in transition