

Landmark study into firefighters' mental health

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The University of Adelaide is conducting the first study of its kind into the mental health of professional firefighters at South Australia's Metropolitan Fire Service (MFS).

The six-month study is focusing on the health and wellbeing of currently serving and recently retired firefighters, systematically investigating the effects of regular exposure to traumatic events.

"Currently there is insufficient understanding of the burden of traumatic exposures experienced by firefighters," says Professor Sandy McFarlane, Director of the University's Centre for Traumatic Stress Studies.

"This project will provide valuable information about the current fitness of firefighters and assist in developing strategies to maintain longevity of service, as well as assisting those with any emerging impairment.

"The critical issue is the impact of the cumulative burden of traumatic exposures over the lifespan of a professional firefighter, and how this impacts on their fitness for duty," Professor McFarlane says.

MFS Deputy Chief Officer, Mick Smith, says it's hoped the groundbreaking University of Adelaide study will further help the fire service with supporting the [mental health](#) needs of firefighters.

"We believe this study will not only help the MFS, but other fire services and emergency services across Australia, with meaningful data about the

effects on personnel of repeated exposures to potentially [traumatic events](#).

"We hope the data collected will help us shape future policy and procedure surrounding recruitment, early intervention, health maintenance, career planning, workforce structure and the management of [occupational health](#) and safety risks," says Deputy Chief Officer Smith.

Study participants are being drawn from three areas: currently serving full-time MFS personnel, currently serving retained (part-time) MFS personnel, and ex-serving MFS firefighters who transitioned out of the service between 2007-2014.

The study is being conducted by the University of Adelaide's Centre for Traumatic Stress Studies in collaboration with researchers from the University of New South Wales and Monash University.

"At the conclusion of this study, there will be a well-mapped model of the transition points in a firefighter's career that need to be managed. These issues are important for planning the occupational health services needed for the MFS in order to ensure that [firefighters](#), whose work puts their [health](#) at potential risk, are given adequate protection and security in the performance of a role that is critical to the protection of society," Professor McFarlane says.

Provided by University of Adelaide

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