

WELLBEING AND SOCIAL CONNECTION PROGRAM EVALUATION— Key Findings

Summary

Report reference: 2025 Evaluation of Fortem's Wellbeing and Social Connection program

Organisation (evaluator): Gallipoli Medical Research

Commissioned by: Fortem Australia

Executive Summary

In 2025, Gallipoli Medical Research independently evaluated the performance and impact of Fortem Australia's Wellbeing and Social Connection Program for first responders and their families, assessing client demographics, program themes and metrics, and overall program performance.

The program delivers free in-person and virtual social connection activities to first responders and their families which are designed to boost mental fitness, create opportunities to adapt and cope with new situations, and reduce stress.

By examining these areas, the evaluation offers valuable insights to guide future decisions, optimise program strategies, and understand and enhance client engagement, while allowing the program to move from being evidence-informed to evidence-based.

The evaluation found the program is delivering strong social-connection benefits, trusted health gains, and exceptional participant advocacy.

Methodology

The evaluation utilised both parametric and non-parametric methods to analyse both quantitative and qualitative data collected by Fortem between January 2023 and June 2024.

Key Findings

- *Participation profile:* Of the 1,462 respondents, the majority were female (59.8%), over the age of 40 (72.9%) and in paid employment (63.1%). Nearly half of them (45.4%) attended with a family member, indicating that wellbeing and recovery are often approached in a family context.
- *Strong program retention:* 75% of attendees came to multiple Fortem events, demonstrating sustained engagement and value beyond one-time participation.
- *Partnership Attendance Advantage:* Participants who attended with partners or workmates reported significantly higher health and wellbeing benefits compared to those attending alone or with family/friends.
- *Primary program impact - connection:* 75% of participants identified 'Connect' as the main wellbeing benefit from Fortem activities, highlighting the program's strength in building social bonds
- *Work-life balance:* There was a moderate positive correlation ($r=0.35$) between work-life balance satisfaction and overall mental health ratings, showing these factors strongly influence each other

- *Reduced stigma:* Fortem participants showed notably lower mental health stigma rates than typical first responders as reported in Beyond Blue research (26% vs 61% avoiding disclosure; 17% vs 36% reluctant to seek help)
- *Impact on social connectedness:* Over 64% reported strengthened social networks, and 54% identified a lasting 'sense of connection to first responder community'. This finding suggests the program's effectiveness in addressing social isolation and building a support network, which are critical protective factors for wellbeing in first responders.
- *Interconnected wellbeing benefits:* Strong correlations found between multiple wellbeing factors – improving one area (like social support) creates benefits in others (work-life balance, mental health).
- *Wellbeing outcomes:* Most participants (89%) felt the activity benefited their health and wellbeing and 93% reported improved mental health awareness, with nearly half (48%) rating their mental health as 'Good/Very Good'. This finding indicates that participation has a meaningful impact on both awareness and perceived wellbeing, aligning with the program's core goals.
- *Organisational role and influence:* Most participants (58.2%) indicated that Fortem was involved in over 60% of their wellbeing commitment, with higher median involvement score for females (60 vs. 50). The gender difference could suggest that Fortem may be particularly influential for female participants, prompting consideration for how to improve reach for male participants.
- *Resilience and help-seeking attitudes:* Only 38% of respondents agreed they usually handle difficult times with little trouble, with 26% stating that they would be embarrassed to admit a mental health condition and 17.4% would be reluctant to seek help. These findings suggest a need to further address stigma and promote more resilience-building initiatives in the program's future design.
- *Satisfaction and likelihood to return:* Almost all participants (99%) were very likely to attend another Fortem activity, 99% were very likely to recommend to a friend/colleague and 98.6% felt activity was well organised. This very high satisfaction and likelihood of return/recommendation indicate strong program effectiveness, trust in the provider, and potential for ongoing engagement and organic growth via word of mouth.
- *Work-life balance:* Over 55.6% of participants were satisfied or very satisfied with their work-life balance.

Conclusion

Altogether, these findings indicate that the Wellbeing and Social Connection program is delivering considerable social-connection benefits, trusted health gains and exceptional participant advocacy. The evaluation also highlights opportunities to broaden demographic reach of the services and enhance resilience-building content and strategies included in the program.

Limitations & context

Findings reflect data available as of June 2024 and the methods described in the full report. Results may not generalise beyond Australian First Responders and their families who engaged with Fortem's Wellbeing and Social Connection Program.

Fidelity statement:

Gallipoli Medical Research has prepared this summary and endorses it as an accurate reflection of the key findings and conclusions set out in the 2025 Evaluation of Fortem's Wellbeing and Social Connection program. This endorsement relates to the accuracy of the summary only; it is not a certification, warranty, or ongoing approval of Fortem or its services.

Signed: Laura Garcia Carrascosa



Date: 22/08/2025

Dr Laura G. Carrascosa

Director, Health Translation and Strategic Partnerships

Gallipoli Medical Research

CarrascosaL@GallipoliResearch.org.au

www.GallipoliResearch.com.au

Greenslopes Private Hospital,
Newdegate St, Greenslopes QLD 4120

CAREER MANAGEMENT PROGRAM EVALUATION—Key findings summary

Report reference: 2025 Evaluation of Fortem's Career Management program

Organisation (evaluator): Gallipoli Medical Research

Commissioned by: Fortem Australia

Executive Summary

In 2025, Gallipoli Medical Research independently evaluated the performance and impact of Fortem Australia's Career Management Program for first responders, assessing client demographics, program themes and metrics, and overall program performance.

The program provides eligible first responders with career resilience and career transition programs and services to support them in the next stage of their career and life through tailored workshops, seminars, self-paced learning modules, wellbeing, education and lifestyle resources, all underpinned by supported case management.

By examining these areas, the evaluation offers valuable insights to guide future decisions, optimise program strategies, and understand and enhance client engagement, while allowing the program to move from being evidence-informed to evidence-based.

The evaluation found the program not only helps first responders land new employment or reintegrate with their agencies, but also demonstrably boosts wellbeing and earns exceptional client advocacy; confirming its strategic value as both a retention and transition tool across the sector.

Methodology

The evaluation utilised both parametric and non-parametric methods to analyse both quantitative and qualitative data collected by Fortem between 2021 and 2024.

Key Findings

- *Participation profile:* The majority of respondents were first responders in active service (57.4%), working in the police service (76.6%) and identified most with the term 'law enforcement' (57.4%). Over 76.6% of respondents indicated that they had attended a natural disaster and 89.4% reported they had attended a critical event.
- *Program completion and return-to-service:* Of 1,543 enrolled clients, 49.1 % (n=757) fully completed the Career Management Program (CMP), and 48.5% (n = 367) of these reported having obtained employment following their participation. Over 21.5 % (n=331) of the 1,543 enrolled clients re-entered their first-responder agency before program completion. This finding suggests that the program provides first responders with valuable resources to accelerate safe, structured transitions back to work.
- *Breadth of service utilisation:* Clients accessed a mean of 5.3 CMP services (SD = 3.0), with the community portal used by 70.9 % of all clients. This high uptake across multiple services indicates that participants are actively exploring the CMP's full ecosystem, while the community portal's popularity underscores its central role as a first point of connection and peer support.

- *Capacity and satisfaction:* Clients reported a 1-point increase in both their perceived capacity for work and their satisfaction with potential employment outcomes following participation in the CMP program, with the average capacity rating rising from 4 (pre-program) to 5 (post-program), while satisfaction levels improved from 2 to 3. It is important to note that the sample is not matched, and these results may reflect two unlinked groups of respondents.
- *Post-program employment:* Nearly one in two clients secured employment (48.5 %, n = 367) after participation, with 85.8 % of those hires coming from the police service. The strong showing by police reflects the higher representation of police clients and suggests the CMP is particularly well-aligned to the transferable skills and hiring pipelines relevant to police backgrounds.
- *Sector of re-employment:* Successful job seekers were more likely to enter the public sector, especially government roles. This trend signals that CMP coaching effectively translates first-responder competencies (e.g., compliance, risk management) into language valued by public-sector employers, widening career pathways beyond frontline duty.
- *Agency-specific re-engagement:* The Australian Federal Police (AFP) recorded the highest return-to-service rate at 36%, suggesting that the CMP's coordination with that agency is particularly effective, and that this could be a best-practice model for other services seeking to retain experienced staff.
- *Motivation for re-engagement:* The top reason cited was a desire to 'reinvigorate or re-spark my career' (42.9%). This reflects a proactive rather than remedial use of the CMP and that participants might see the program not only as a safety net, but as a launch pad for renewed professional growth.
- *Wellbeing improvement:* Mean Personal Wellbeing Index scores rose from 66.1 (challenged) at entry to 75.7 (normal) at exit, an average gain of 9.6 points. This near-10-point lift moves most clients into the 'normal' range, evidencing that the CMP tangibly enhances psychological resilience at a critical career-transition juncture. However, this outcome needs to be considered with caution because entry and exit cohorts are not linked.
- *Psychological distress improvements:* Average Kessler Psychological Distress Scale scores (K10) decreased from 20.8 (pre-program) to 16.4 (post-program), reflecting a 4.4 point reduction in overall psychological distress.
- *Participant satisfaction:* 96.5 % of clients scored the question 'Would you recommend the CMP to a friend/colleague?' at 8 or above (0–10 scale) with a median of 10. This endorsement rate places the CMP as a top professional-development program, building its credibility when engaging future participants or funding stakeholders.

Conclusion

Altogether, these findings show that the Career Management Program not only aids first responders in achieving new employment or re-engaging with their agencies, but also may

improve clients' wellbeing and earns clients' advocacy. This highlights its potential value as both a retention and transition tool.

Limitations & context

Findings reflect data available as of June 2024 and the methods described in the full report. Results may not generalise beyond Australian First Responders and their families who engaged with Fortem's Career Management Program.

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