



Urgent action needed on Senate Inquiry into first responder mental health

New charity event launched to raise funds for research and services that support Australia's everyday heroes

CANBERRA, 14 February 2023: A new charity walk raising awareness and funds for first responder mental health research and initiatives has been officially launched this morning at a special event hosted by Senator David Pocock at Parliament House.

The Heart 2 Heart Walk is a 3,000km challenge linking Lambert Centre of Australia in the Northern Territory (Heart of Country) to Australia's Parliament House in Canberra (Heart of Nation), aiming to draw attention to challenges around first responder mental health and wellbeing.

[First responders](#) are twice as likely to report suicidal thoughts, three times more likely to have a plan for completion, and six times more likely to experience symptoms of PTSD (for those who had worked more than 10 years in the role).

Despite these shocking figures, there has been little or no progress to any of the recommendations from the [2019 Australian Senate Inquiry](#) into first responder suicide, PTSD, and premature mortality.

The Heart 2 Heart Foundation, who are organising the walk, is appealing for urgent action on the Senate Inquiry recommendations, including a national action plan on first responder mental health, a national register of health professionals who specialise in first responder mental health, and mental health support services for retired first responders as well as their families.

Keynote speakers at the launch event – including Senator Anne Urquart, Attorney General The Hon Mark Dreyfuss KC MP, Admiral (Ret'd) Chris Barrie AC, Allan Sparkes CV OAM, and Professor Nicole Sadler AM CSC – expressed disappointment at the lack of progress to better support first responders.

Chair of the Heart 2 Heart Foundation, Vince Pannell APM, said: “The Heart 2 Heart journey is more than just a walk; it's our commitment to fighting for better mental health services for all Australian first responders and their families. We need to ensure these ordinary people, who do extraordinary things protecting, saving, caring and rescuing the community, day in day out, receive the support they need.”

The Heart 2 Heart Walk's first Platinum Sponsor is Police Bank, who have been part of getting this walk to reality from the start, providing the original seed funding last year. Another recent Platinum Sponsor is The Australian Federal Police Association, who continue to provide strong support to the walk planning group. The current Gold Sponsors include Raytheon Australia, Chelsea Wealth, David Healey Solicitors, Holan Group, The Experience Collectors and Torode Solutions. Silver Sponsors include the NT Police Association, Australian Paramedics Association, the ACT Government and the Rolfe Family.

CEO of Police Bank, Greg McKenna, said: “As a member-owned bank, part of Police Bank's purpose is to give back to our community and there really isn't a more important cause than supporting the mental health of our first responders. We're proud to be the major sponsor of the Heart 2 Heart



Walk, working to achieve better outcomes for our police, paramedics, firies, and frontline emergency services.”

[INSERT MORE QUOTES IF NEEDED]

Walkers undertaking the long-distance journey will depart from the Northern Territory on 1 July 2023 and arrive back at Parliament House on 28 September 2023.

For further information or to register interest as a walker or sponsor, please visit www.heart2heartwalk.org

For interview requests, images, or further media enquiries please contact:

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