**Subject:** MEDIA ALERT: Urgent action needed for First Responders’ mental health

**Body:**

Good morning,

On Tuesday 14 February 2023, Senator David Pocock is hosting the official launch of a new charity walk raising funds and awareness for First Responder mental health research and initiatives.

The Heart 2 Heart Walk is a 2,600km charity walk 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.

Compared to everyday Australians, First Responders are:

* Twice as likely to report suicidal thoughts and three times more likely to have a plan for completion
* Six times more likely to experience symptoms of PTSD (for those who had worked more than 10 years in role)

*\*Beyond Blue’s* [*Answering the call*](https://www.beyondblue.org.au/docs/default-source/resources/bl1874-pes-exec-summary-final_web.pdf) *report*

To date, there has been little or no progress to any of the recommendations from the 2019 Australian Senate Inquiry Report into First Responder suicide, PTSD, and premature mortality – [*“The people behind 000: mental health of our first responders”*](https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/committees/reportsen/024252/toc_pdf/Thepeoplebehind000mentalhealthofourfirstresponders.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf)*.*

The Heart 2 Heart Foundation, which is coordinating the walk, is calling for action on these 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.

Visual opportunities:

* Walkers around the Central Basin at National Emergency Services Memorial (NESM)
* Official launch at Parliament House including speakers:
  + Senator David Pocock
  + Senator Anne Urquart
  + Attorney General Hon Mark Dreyfuss KC MP
  + Admiral (Ret’d) Chris Barrie AC, FAICD, FAIM, FARPI, RAN. Fearless PTSDAUSTNZ
  + Allan Sparkes CV VA OAM
  + Professor Nicole Sadler AM CSC

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| **Time** | **Location** | **Event** | **Speakers** |
| 09:00am | NESM, carpark at Intersection of ANZAC Parade and Parkes Way | Address to ACT and NSW emergency services | Heart 2 Heart Foundation Chair and Secretary |
| 12:00pm | Mural Hall, Parliament House | Official launch | Senator David Pocock, Senator Anne Urquart, keynote speakers (including Attorney General), heads of emergency services, unions, other key stakeholders, and sponsors |

**For further information and to arrange interviews, please reply by email or contact:**

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