



**FIRE +
RESCUE**

LIFE BEYOND FIRE AND RESCUE NSW

**PLANNING AND SUPPORT FOR CAREER
TRANSITION**

2023 V1.1

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FOREWORD

A career with Fire and Rescue NSW provides purpose, immense personal fulfillment, a unique lifestyle with a positive self-image and long-lasting friendships.

When faced with the prospect of a new career or retirement because of injury, illness or other reasons, the transition can be daunting and it can take time to adjust. Your contribution to FRNSW and the skills you have brought to your role are gratefully recognised. At this critical time, we want to continue to support you through your personal transition to the next stage of your life.

For many, firefighting is the only career you've ever known (or wanted). While different responses are to be expected depending on the reasons for leaving your role, someone who has carefully planned for the next step in their career is more likely to feel positive.

This booklet and the accompanying resources have been developed from extensive consultation with firefighters experiencing career transition. We are committed to help guide and prepare you to take that next step with skills and confidence. You will find

information, strategies and support services for you and your family to help you manage your transition.

I encourage you to use the resources available. Seek support, you don't need to go it alone! We're committed to constantly improving the service we can offer you in recognition of the service you have given.



Paul Baxter
Commissioner



1. PREPARING FOR CHANGE

It is important that you take time to recognise the skills and professionalism you have developed as a firefighter, as this will also help you approach your next career move with a positive mindset.

Leaving our organisation is not always a choice. Unexpected health conditions or injury can impact your ability to do the work you love, and the transition from FRNSW can occur without as much time to plan as you may have anticipated. Change and transition can be challenging at the best of times, however when faced with the reality of no longer being a firefighter, it can affect your identity, sense of community and sense of belonging.

It is normal to feel a range of emotions and your wellbeing is our priority. You are not alone. It's important to stay connected with trusted relationships and seek support. To ensure you make good decisions about your future, you will need to stay well and create a balance in your health, thinking, feelings and behaviours. As you adjust to change, focus on your physical and emotional health, and consider the impact transition may have on you and your family.

While this transitional period can be difficult and a bit of a whirlwind, it is also a great time to reflect on your career and what you have achieved as a firefighter.

As a firefighter you have gained effective and transferable capabilities regardless of your length of service. The skillset that a firefighter develops is desirable to both public and private employers. Your service and accomplishments are valued and appreciated by the whole community. Even becoming a firefighter is an enormous achievement. Consider for a moment: in 2022 there were approximately 33 candidates for every successful application. In other words, only 3% of applicants successfully become permanent firefighters!

During your time with FRNSW, you have helped countless people on the worst day of their lives and provided education and support to those who need it most. As you transition into new roles and challenges, you need to remember and celebrate the positive impact you have had on your colleagues and community.



**BACK
YOURSELF AND
RECOGNISE
WHAT
YOU HAVE
ACHIEVED**

2. GREG'S STORY

Retiring early with physical injuries raises questions about one's future (work) potential, particularly when it prevents you from returning to your pre-injury position as an operational firefighter. In the few months prior to retiring, I kept contact with some trusted peer support colleagues. They had my wellbeing front and centre. Even after my separation date, they provided advice about looking after yourself, like keeping healthy and active, and ensuring you have a network of family and friends that you can go to for support and provided contact details about where to access help with any issues that may arise.

They also reminded me to look back over my emergency service career with gratitude, for service given to the community and friendships built with fellow firefighters. Time flies when you're having fun; as one peer said to me. Entering a liminal space (medical discharge), is a bit like a neither here nor there place.... like when that panic sets in when your sat nav drops out of connection... However, the journey continues on. It's not as easy as one hopes, but I was encouraged to push through to see what opportunities would unfold, to face new challenges, and in the process, discovering a little bit more about myself, and where I might fit in. After a few weeks, I took up a role and kept active by driving a school bus for a couple of hours per week. This kept me occupied and gave me space to think and settle into a post fire brigade mode.

A few months later, FRNSW's Health & Safety Branch provided information about having my recognition of prior learning assessed to determine what my transferable skills were, my interests, and my capacity to undertake any future employment options.

This assessment process was free of charge. They looked at my lived experiences gained within the brigade, provided my service and training records, certificate of service and a letter confirming years of employment, tasks and position. This information enabled me to secure recognised qualifications and gave me confidence to look more widely for what work opportunities I might want to pursue.

Six months after leaving FRNSW, despite still having health issues, I found a part-time position in a workplace health and safety role which aligned with my vocational skills, and newly acquired qualifications. So, up to the present time, I have continued working in this position, and feel much more content. I still keep in contact with my former colleagues, both locally and through events like the FBEU's Rex Threlfo Annual Toast and when able, district reunion and/or retirement functions. I am thankful that my paradigm shift into a non-Fire and Rescue vocational deployment was assisted by the support and resources of my former peers, staff from within my local zone and people and culture directorate, and mostly from my loving family who gave me 'space and time' to adjust.

“I am thankful that my paradigm shift into a non-Fire and Rescue vocational deployment was assisted by the support and resources”

Greg Williams

Station Officer - 31 years
with FRNSW



3.

YOUR KEY CONTACTS

FRIENDS AND FAMILY

Your family and friends know you better than anyone and are often the first to pick up on any changes. Your peers and colleagues form part of your social support network and have shared knowledge and experience. If you are struggling with the transition, catching up with an old friend or colleague for coffee can make a huge difference to your wellbeing.

RETURN TO WORK ADVISOR

Your Return to Work Advisor will continue to talk with you, your Command and your treating professionals during the transition process. They will be able to help you identify any reasonable adjustment that may be available in your current role, in consultation with your Command. However, you will be referred to a Fitness to Continue Coordinator who has specialist skills in the assessment of your fitness for duty. It is important you feel supported so your Return to Work Advisor may remain involved to provide assistance and advice whenever required.

FITNESS TO CONTINUE COORDINATOR

During the process of assessing your fitness for duty, your Fitness to Continue Coordinator is your key contact at FRNSW. They will be able to inform you of the process from assessment to outcome and provide resources and support including options for re-training and employment. They are there to answer any questions you may have and assist you to understand your entitlements under the Firefighter's Death and Disability Award.

SUPPORT THROUGH WORKERS' COMPENSATION

Where medical discharge occurs, your EML Case Manager will take over day-to-day management of your claim and ongoing recovery. If you have a workers' compensation claim, your EML Case Manager will arrange a time to introduce you to a new case manager at EML who specialises in transition support services and can assist you in the next stages of your recovery. Your new case manager will ensure your payments continue directly from EML following your last date of service with FRNSW. FRNSW and EML will work together to provide you with career transition services and recruitment support. Rehabilitation providers support your recovery and vocational specialists help you to develop and meet new goals.

“I was diagnosed with chronic PTSD in 2014 and was absent from work for approximately 7 months. It took me a while to contact FRNSW about what had occurred and my time spent in hospital, but my Return to Work Advisor was very sympathetic and worked hard with me to ensure as smooth as possible transition back into the workforce, no longer operational, but in a position that was meaningful both to myself and FRNSW.”

SO MB

28 years with FRNSW

4.

LOOKING AFTER YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

Change is hard. A variety of support is available to help you if you have a work related or off duty injury; if you can still work but no longer as an operational firefighter; you are thinking of retirement; or if you are simply struggling with the thought of leaving or aging.

Try to remember there will be life after FRNSW and your key contacts can help you connect with the right kind of support when you need it.

WELLBEING COORDINATOR AND PEER SUPPORT

T: 0448 295 725

E: WellbeingCoordinator@fire.nsw.gov.au

Peer Support Officers are trained to provide colleagues with assistance, non-judgmental support and resources in their time of need. They recognise and refer colleagues who could benefit from counselling or need help with problems. The Peer Support Officer mission statement is to offer assistance and appropriate support to employees during and after times of professional and personal distress

FRNSW RETIREES PEERS SUPPORT

T: 0477 342 750

Retired.PeersFRNSW@fire.nsw.gov.au

Retired members of FRNSW volunteer their time to offer support to retired firefighters and families transitioning into retirement.

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (EAP)

(For you and your family)

T: 1300 687 327

The Employee Assistance Program offers counselling to FRNSW employees and their immediate family through its extensive network of providers.

RETIREES ASSOCIATION

The NSW Fire Brigades Retirees Association Incorporated, is a voluntary and free association open to any retired operational, administrative and trades member of FRNSW and includes spouses and partners. It aims to help maintain the friendships formed at FRNSW through regular meetings of members,

an annual luncheon and advice of upcoming events, such as retirement functions.

PSYCHOLOGICAL TREATMENT PLAN GAP PAYMENT

(For FRNSW employees)

Available from your GP, this allows you up to 10 sessions per year with a mental health professional, rebated by Medicare and FRNSW. Your Return to Work Advisor can provide more information.

CHAPLAIN

E: chaplain@fire.nsw.gov.au

FRNSW Chaplains offer confidential and non-judgemental care and support to all employees and their families during times of stress and major life events.

BEYOND BLUE

1300 22 4636

beyondblue.org.au

Beyond Blue provides information and 24-hour support to help everyone in Australia achieve their best possible mental health, whatever their age and wherever they live.

LIFELINE

13 11 14

lifeline.org.au

24-hour access to online, phone and face-to-face crisis support, suicide prevention and mental health support services. They exist so that no person in Australia has to face their darkest moments alone.

ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUGS INFORMATION SERVICE

1800 422 599 | 9361 8000

yourroom.com.au

A confidential, anonymous 24-hour information, advice and referral service regarding alcohol and drug issues

BLACK DOG INSTITUTE

(02) 9382 4530

9am - 7pm | Monday - Friday

blackdoginstitute.org.au

Dedicated to understanding, preventing and treating mental illness. Resources include myCompass which provides a personalised self-help program that you can use on your mobile phone, computer and or/table. Visit mycompass.org.au

WAY AHEAD MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION NSW

1300 794 991

wayahead.org.au

The Mental Health Information Line provides information, telephone support and referral on issues relating to mental health generally. Website has a range of information and resources.

WAY AHEAD ANXIETY DISORDERS INFORMATION LINE

1300 794 992

**9am - 7pm | Monday - Friday
(message can be left outside of these times)**

mentalhealth.asn.au

This information line focuses more specifically on anxiety disorders. They have information available on a range of services including community mental health, crisis intervention and treatment services, as well as accommodation, practical care, and law.

COUNSELLING ONLINE

1800 422 599 | 9361 8000

counsellingonline.org.au

24-hour assistance for those concerned about alcohol or other drugs. Their primary service is online text-based counselling for people worried about their drinking or drug use. It is also available if you are concerned about a family member, relative or friend.



BACK YOURSELF FOR CHANGE

Leaving FRNSW doesn't have to mean losing your career opportunities or disengaging with service and community.

"The rehab and retraining initiative offered me timely support and compassionate guidance. I didn't think anything was available in the country but the work experience and some self-exploration has resulted in a substantial boost in confidence in myself.

Prior to this opportunity, I was extremely unsure that I could be of any value moving forward within the "wider" working community and had little awareness of what knowledge and skills I have to offer outside of firefighting.

Thank you so much for the opportunity to believe in myself again, it's been a "Life Changer" for me."

SD

19 years with FRNSW



5.

SUPPORT FOR CHANGE

The process of change from being a firefighter to the next stage of your life can be challenging, overwhelming and for some, it can be profoundly difficult. The personal impact can be minimised by preparing for change in advance.

In addition to wellbeing support services, FRNSW offers specific services to assist your transition into a new career or retirement.

REHABILITATION AND RETRAINING

If you are no longer fit for operational firefighting duties, you may elect to participate in a period of rehabilitation and retraining under the Death & Disability Award. FRNSW will establish a temporary position and you will be supported with a range of vocational supports and resources. The aim of the program is to provide firefighters who are unable to continue work with FRNSW, the opportunity to train for and obtain alternative employment. Suitable vocational experience, specific training and industry partnerships aim to achieve a smooth transition to alternate employment.

CAREER TRANSITION SUPPORT

When you are ready to explore your options for a career change, there are numerous services available to support you.

For those unsure about career options, support is available to identify and build on existing skills that are transferrable to other employment. This may be internally to a non-operational role or a role with a new employer. Career transition support may include identifying goals and areas to build upon within a period of rehabilitation and retraining. Your Return to Work Advisor or Fitness to Continue Coordinator can help you.

Assistance is available for those who have an idea about what they want to do next but may need help with formalising qualifications, resume writing, and applying for jobs.

CAREER COACHING

The skills and experience you have gained through your time with FRNSW are highly valued and easily transferable to many roles. FRNSW has linked with Max Coaching, a company providing professional career coaches who can help you explore career options and opportunities, update your resume, improve your interview skills and access any other aspects of career transition support. Access to Max Coaching can be arranged through your FRNSW Return to Work Advisor.

RETIREMENT PLANNING

Retirement means different things to different people, and while some people are prepared and relaxed about retirement, for others it is unplanned and may be daunting. Whatever stage you may find yourself, there are key activities for consideration and information you should know about resources and support. Early planning means you are better prepared for the unexpected.

FRNSW has resources to help you work through what retirement means for you and consider financial, personal, social, and professional implications. Whether retirement for you is 12 months, 5 or 10 years from now, we can help you explore considerations.

It's never too early or too late to start planning for retirement!

ONLINE SUPPORT

The FRNSW intranet has multiple resources to explain the services available and provide further information on Injury Management including personal stories from other firefighters who have been through career transition following injury.

6.

CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

EDUCATION FUNDING

If you have an accepted workers' compensation claim, you can request funding for training to assist you in furthering your career. The College of Law Education and Training (CLET) have developed pathways for firefighters to obtain Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) by considering the training, skills and experience obtained during your employment. In addition, or alternatively, you can apply for training that is consistent with your career goals. There are some parameters that need to be followed, so usually a rehabilitation provider will assist you to identify the training and apply for the relevant funding. If you do not have a rehabilitation provider, please contact your FRNSW Return to Work Advisor or EML Case Manager.

REHABILITATION PROVIDERS

Rehabilitation providers are available through workers' compensation and can assist with vocational counselling, assessment and job seeking skills. They are generally of most benefit when your career options are significantly limited by your medical condition and more intensive assistance is required. They can help you access education funding and tap into government supported options such as Work Trials and the Jobcover Placement Program to assist you in finding employment. Under workers' compensation, you can choose your own rehabilitation provider, so keep checking in with your goals to make sure they are providing the right support for you as your needs may change.

JOB OPPORTUNITIES

Many opportunities exist for firefighters in the open job market. Your skills, such as emergency management, training, workplace health and safety, compliance, risk management and first aid are highly valued in the public and private sector. You can monitor the relevant job sites to identify roles you are interested in.

FRNSW Internal Jobs Board

jobsnsw.taleo.net/careersection/nswfb/jobsearch.ftl?lang=en

NSW Public Service Internal Jobs Board

jobsnsw.taleo.net/careersection/nswgov_eoi/jobsearch.ftl

NSW Public Service External Jobs Board

iworkfor.nsw.gov.au

NSW Councils


job-directory.com.au

CLET - Match your firefighter training, knowledge, and skills to nationally recognised qualifications!

VOLUNTEERING

While there are a lot of options available for firefighters, few roles can replicate the sense of purpose, community service, and comradery that firefighting provides. Therefore, as part of your career planning, you may want to consider joining volunteer organisations. Depending on your circumstances, this might be a good first step back into work or may be in addition to your new job. The knowledge and skills you have acquired throughout your career are likely to be sought after by volunteer organisations. An option that has been very successful for first responders is Disaster Relief Australia. They offer a unique opportunity for firefighters to be part of humanitarian efforts with a unified purpose, mission and intensity that is reminiscent of an operational deployment.

More information is available at **disasterreliefaus.org**



Firefighters have successfully transitioned to work in private emergency services companies. Positions are often obtained through former colleagues, and private training companies.

7.

KNOW YOUR FINANCES

If you are medically discharged from FRNSW, you may be eligible for benefits under the Death & Disability scheme. To help with your exit from the organisation, your Fitness to Continue Coordinator will discuss financial benefits under the scheme. Following your last date of service, it may take six to eight weeks to receive your payment. If you make a claim for total and permanent impairment benefit, this process can take several months.

Workers' compensation exists to help you recover from work-related injury by providing required medical treatments and supporting your income if your ability to work and earn is affected by your injury. Benefits and entitlements change as your situation changes over the duration of your claim. Your weekly benefits may reduce when you are no longer employed by FRNSW and will be paid by EML rather than FRNSW. Your Return to Work Advisor and EML Case Manager will be able to provide details specific to you.

Financial stress can affect relationships and your health, so it is very important to seek support as early as possible. There are many free services that offer financial support. If you find yourself in debt, ring the credit and debt hotline on 1800 808 488. They can help you sort out your money and find a financial counsellor who can talk with people you owe money to and work out a manageable arrangement.

STEPS TO CONSIDER

1 SEEK FINANCIAL ADVICE
Sooner rather than later.

2 DETERMINE YOUR FINANCIAL FUTURE
Set up an interview with your superannuation provider or financial advisor. It's important to understand your financial future.

3 KNOWLEDGE IS POWER
Attend superannuation seminars, which are usually available through your superannuation fund. Prepare a list of questions that you need answered. Consider attending more than one of these seminars and include your partner (if applicable).

The most common concern raised by firefighters when leaving FRNSW is financial security. It is important to be aware of your financial situation and sources of income, so you are comfortable with your ongoing financial security.

Alternatively, you can contact:

CREDIT AND DEBT HOTLINE

1800 808 488

MONEYCARE

**[salvos.org.au/need-help/
financial-assistance/
financial-counselling/](https://salvos.org.au/need-help/financial-assistance/financial-counselling/)**

Moneycare is a financial counselling service run through the Salvation Army with over 40 offices across NSW.

FINANCIAL RIGHTS LEGAL CENTRE

1800 007 007

financialrights.org.au

Free legal advice and financial counselling to low income and disadvantaged consumers on credit, debt, and banking matters.

ASIC'S MONEY SMART

moneysmart.gov.au

Free, independent guidance to help you take steps to improve your personal finances. There are also calculators, tips and tools for a range of financial topics including retirement income planning.

AWARE SUPERANNUATION

aware.com.au

Advisor services and financial webinars.

APPS FOR YOUR MOBILE DEVICE

There are numerous free and paid apps to help manage your finances, understand where your money is going and manage savings goals.

FINANCIAL PLANNING ASSOCIATION

[FPA.com.au](https://fpa.com.au)

Assistance in finding a qualified financial advisor.



GET A CHECK UP

Consider having a full medical examination with your GP and a 'well check'. Not only will this give you peace of mind, a medical and well check could direct any potential future support and help you decide on whether to take a pension or lump sum superannuation payment. A well check considers your psychological wellbeing and is available to all staff. It can be arranged through your supervisor at any time.

When getting a 'well check' you should encourage your partner/spouse (if applicable) to engage in the process as they are often the first to notice changes in you and the first to encourage you to seek help. It is also important to recognise the impact your career transition can have on your family. Make sure you have discussed the process with them and they understand the support available for themselves and you.

KNOW YOUR FINANCES

The most common concern raised by firefighters when leaving FRNSW is financial security. It is important to be aware of your financial situation and sources of income, so you are comfortable with your ongoing financial security.

KEEP TRAINING

Exercise, teamwork and fitness has been a large part of your life up to now. It is important to retain that energy and competitive attitude as it will help you in future roles. The maintenance of a healthy lifestyle will also reduce your risk of diseases such as diabetes and joint problems.

Firefighters often arrange groups in their local area for different activities such as surfing and golf. Alternatively, community based activities such as 'park run' or 'live life, get active' are a good option to maintain fitness (see parkrun.com.au or livelifegetactive.com for your local group). If you have an accepted workers compensation claim, you may be entitled to targeted exercise programs, regardless of whether you have a physical or psychological injury. Talk to your FRNSW Return to Work Advisor or EML Case Manager.

Another option is the NSW Health Get Healthy Program, which offers free and confidential expert advice over the phone. They offer a six-month coaching program, or information only, so you can choose what is right for you. You can contact them on **1300 806 258** or gethealthynsw.com.au

TOP TIPS FOR TRANSITION



STAY CONNECTED

Most firefighters benefit from staying connected with FRNSW, and particularly your current and former platoons and stations. Depending on the reasons for leaving the organisation, you may not feel like doing this straightaway, but it is important to focus on your success and the positive experiences you have had with FRNSW. Try to maintain an informal connection with FRNSW by attending retiree functions, coffee meetings and social club outings arranged by the NSWFB Retirees Association (nswfbr.org.au).

If you are struggling with the transition, the retired peers are a good starting point for contact. Many have been through what you may be experiencing and can give practical advice and support. Retired peers can also liaise with FRNSW on your behalf (with your permission) to ensure you receive the help you need. Even if you are not ready to contact FRNSW, it is most important you maintain your relationships with family and friends. Their support will be invaluable as you move through this transition.

CREATE A NEW ROUTINE AND SET NEW GOALS

Goal setting is a great way of maintaining direction and motivation. Having a clear routine is a great strategy to ensure you maintain a sense of purpose. Get a diary and note all the things you are doing. This can include writing down activities you will do to improve your physical and psychological wellbeing, such as increasing the length or intensity of your workout or setting aside time for relaxation or mindfulness.

If you are job seeking, note this in your diary, but limit it to a maximum of four hours per day. Looking for an enriching job is important, but so is your social, physical and psychological wellbeing.

BACK YOURSELF

Some firefighters are unsure how useful their skills will be in the job market. This is a common concern and adjusting to the new 'normal' is a challenge, but your experience and training are all transferable and valuable to other employers.

Back your strengths and skills. The more effort you put in, the more you will realise the options available to you



LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

You may receive different types of benefits under different legislation with different regulations and it is recommended you seek legal advice regarding a Will, Power of Attorney and Enduring Power of Attorney. It's important to understand the differences between these documents and the relevance to you. Also be aware of superannuation rules relating to beneficiaries of your estate as these are not tied to your Will and the determination of the beneficiaries may not match your expectations.



PUT YOUR HAND UP

It is normal to find change hard. The concerns, emotions, and issues you and your family have don't need to be faced alone. You have friends, colleagues, peers, treating professionals and staff at EML and FRNSW who can help.

All you have to do is put your hand up.



EMBRACE YOUR NEXT CHALLENGE

The information in this booklet has hopefully helped to prepare you for what is ahead.

It can feel scary to move to something unknown, but it can be an exciting opportunity to try something new and if you have the right approach, you never know what opportunities may come your way.

TOP TIPS FOR TRANSITION

CAREER TRANSITION CHECKLIST

1

TALK WITH YOUR FAMILY

Ensure everyone has the support they need

2

CONTACT THE RETIREES ASSOCIATION

3

CONTACT THE RETIRED PEERS

Confirm your local contact

4

TALK WITH YOUR RETURN TO WORK ADVISOR

Find out about job seeking and education funding

5

TALK WITH YOUR FITNESS TO CONTINUE COORDINATOR

Find out about your benefits and ongoing obligations

6

MANAGE YOUR FINANCES

Make an appointment with a financial advisor or
contact an independent service e.g. Moneycare

7

DETERMINE YOUR FINANCIAL FUTURE

Meet with your superannuation provider
and/or book to attend seminars

8

SEEK LEGAL ADVICE

About a Last Will of Testament and Power of Attorney

9

JOIN A LOCAL EXERCISE GROUP

10

LOOK INTO EMERGENCY SERVICES VOLUNTEER OPTIONS

e.g. Team Rubicon Australia

