



The United Firefighters Union of Australia – What we're achieving for you

Dear member,

In my most recent letters I provided you with information on your membership of the United Firefighters Union of Australia (QLD Branch) ("The National Union") and also the dispute between the United Firefighters Union – Queensland (UFUQ) ("The State Union")

In this letter I'd like to speak with you about the important role and achievements of your National Union in protecting your health and safety, and giving you a voice in national and international forums.

Protecting your health

Protecting your health and safety is the primary concern of your National Union – the United Firefighters Union of Australia (UFUA). That's why our work has been focused on four key areas:

- presumptive legislation to protect firefighters from cancer
- banning PFAS to protect firefighter health
- promoting better firefighter welfare
- ensuring firefighters have the best personal protective and safety equipment

Presumptive legislation to protect firefighters from cancer

Firefighters make incredible personal sacrifices to protect the safety and lives of others. It is absolutely critical that when your health is impacted by exposure to toxic substances through the course of your work, you be fully supported in receiving medical treatment and appropriate financial compensation.

The UFUA obtained **presumptive cancer legislation to protect firefighter health** in Australia: the first country in the world to achieve this in every State and Territory.

This was first achieved through the efforts of the National Union in the Commonwealth jurisdiction which in turn opened the way for the introduction of presumptive legislation in the States and Territories. This important achievement could not have been won without the support obtained through the UFUA's links with the International Association of Firefighters.

While there is still much work to do, including expanding the number of cancers covered by presumptive legislation, thousands of Australian firefighters now receive critical health, legal and financial support they would not have otherwise received, should they develop cancer during or after their careers.

Banning PFAS to protect firefighter health

PFAS (per- and poly-fluorinated alkyl substances) are linked to cancer and have historically been widely used in firefighting foams by fire services, in airports and military and industrial facilities.

The UFUA led the international firefighting campaign in relation to PFAS associated with Aqueous Film Forming Foam (AFFF) contamination. This included addressing the meeting of the Stockholm convention in 2019, which led to an international ban on PFOS & PFOA (PFAS).

In Australia the UFUA also organised a National Conference in Canberra on PFAS which led to the adoption of a national policy and action plan which sought to entirely eliminate firefighters' exposure to PFAS, and to protect them and the community from the harmful effects of PFAS contamination.

Promoting better firefighter welfare

The UFUA understands that your health and fitness extend beyond the severe illnesses of cancer and those which may result from exposure to toxic substances like PFAS.

That's why we led the charge for the introduction of a holistic health and well-being program for firefighters across Australia. This included hosting a firefighter wellness conference with international presenters. This led to the pursuit of the "Edmonton Model" of firefighter health and wellbeing. This model is voluntary, confidential, supportive and non-punitive and involves medical evaluation, fitness assessment, injury prevention and rehabilitation as well as nutritional and behavioural health.

This model is now contained in the Victorian and ACT Firefighters' enterprise agreements, and we hope to see this rolled out in further firefighter agreements across Australia.

To support firefighters' mental health, the UFUA has also made submissions to many Federal Parliamentary inquiries on post-traumatic stress, aviation firefighting, and anti-firefighter changes to the Fair Work Act; also appearing before Inquiries to represent frontline firefighters at the highest levels of government.

Ensuring firefighters have the best personal protective and safety equipment

Making sure that Australian firefighters have the access to the world's best practice standard of protective and safety equipment is key role the UFUA plays in protecting your health.

The UFUA plays an important role in maintaining representation on International Standards (ISO) for firefighters, which in turn strongly influences the advancement of firefighter protective clothing.

Additionally, we maintain strong links with the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), which provides all UFU branches with access to a wide range of regulatory material on matters such a fire station design, fire protection equipment and other fire safety standards.

Through our ongoing National Occupational Health and Safety coordination meetings we continue to exchange the latest information and provide guidance to UFU branches across Australia.

These are just some of the ways your National Union – the UFUA, has been critically important in protecting your health, both on the job and throughout your career.

Once again, thank you for the incredible work you do and for your ongoing support. We'll stay in touch, and if you'd like more information, please visit www.ufua.asn.au or email ufuaoffice@ufua.asn.au

Yours in unity

Greg McConville
National President
United Firefighters Union of Australia