SURF LIFE SAVING
NEW ZEALAND

AON

PATROL CAPTAIN COURSE

Training Resource

October 2025

In it for life.

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AON Patrol Captain Award Overview

The Patrol Captain Award will prepare experienced senior Surf Lifeguards to lead and manage routine and non-routine surf lifesaving situations including managing patrols, incidents, rescues and actively manage the health, safety and wellbeing of all patrol members. The course focusses on building skills and knowledge related to leadership, resource management, decision making and compliance with National and Club requirements.

Prerequisites:

- Current member of an SLS club
- Minimum 18 years of age
- Surf Lifeguard Award (refreshed)
    - Or Patrol Support Award (Refreshed) having already held a Surf Lifeguard Award.
- Vice Patrol Captain Award
- Surf First Aid (refreshed)
- Minimum 2 seasons active patrolling experience

Training Information:

1 Complete 6 Online Learning Modules

- PC Duty Module
- PC Lead Module
- PC Coordinate Module
- PC Decide Module
- PC Record Module
- PC Care Module

This suite of online learning modules is a core component of the training pathway and a pre-requisite to the one-day practical Patrol Captains Course. It is important that the online modules are completed in a thorough and considered manner, rather than rushed.

Each module should take approximately 15 minutes to complete, with the full suite totalling around 1 hour 30 minutes.

Taking the time to fully engage with the content, scenarios, activities, and reflection points will ensure that candidates gain the most value from the learning setting them up for success for the face-to-face course.

2 Attend Aon Patrol Captains course (1 day) & Complete workbook during the course

During the course candidates will contribute and reflect through being engaged in scenario desktop activities. Candidates can apply their knowledge, problem-solve, and make decisions without the pressures of a live patrol setting.

New scenario desktop activities help reinforce key concepts, encourage critical thinking, and promote teamwork and communication.

The Patrol Captain Course creates a learning environment that mirrors ‘kapa kotahi’. This strengthens the feeling of being ‘one team’ right from the training course to our beaches.

The one-day course helps develop leadership styles that are inclusive and humble and highlights that Patrol Captains will continue learning from their teams, junior guards, club members and the public.

Workbook:

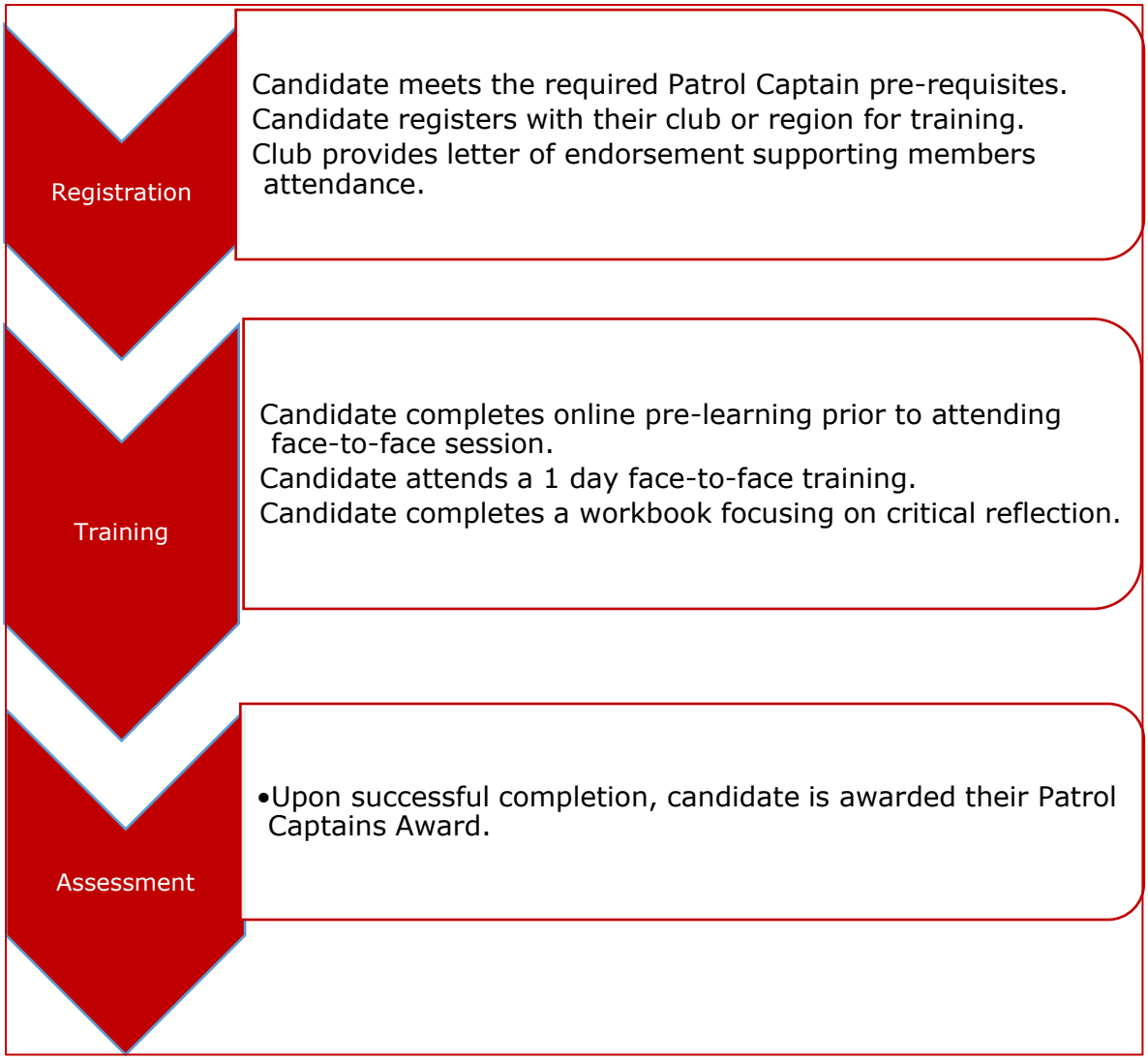
The workbook connects the learning they have completed in the online pre-learning modules with the practical, scenario-based experiences delivered during the one-day course.
It brings together key content, leadership principles, and operational knowledge in a format that encourages reflection, application, and growth.

Qualification outcomes:

1. Explain the purpose of the Patrol Captain in a leadership role.
2. Develop team leadership skills and techniques that can be applied to a range of situations in an SLSNZ context.
3. Utilise skills and techniques to contribute to the development of a high performing, engaged and motivated team on patrol.
4. Utilise SLSNZ policies, procedures and technology to effectively manage risk.
5. Utilise SLSNZ support systems in your role.
6. Apply NSOPs and CSOPs to patrol situations.
7. Manage patrol capability, resources and other factors in a variety of different situations.
8. Make complex decisions that follow SLSNZ policy, procedure and guidelines that considers the situation and patrol capability.
9. Co-ordinate and manage overall responses to minor and major incidents.

This refreshed Patrol Captain training pathway is designed to create well-prepared leaders, equipped not just with knowledge, but with the practical skills and judgement needed to manage people, respond to incidents, and deliver safe effective patrols in today’s dynamic NZ beach environments.

Patrol Captain Training Pathway



Duty

This section outlines the roles and responsibilities of a SLSNZ Patrol Captain.

The purpose of a Patrol Captain

In Surf Life Saving New Zealand (SLSNZ), the Patrol Captain plays a pivotal leadership role within the patrol structure. More than just a supervisory position, the Patrol Captain is responsible for guiding their team to deliver safe, effective, and professional lifesaving services.

This role is central to ensuring not only the safety of beachgoers but also the cohesion, performance, and development of the patrol team.

As a leader, the Patrol Captain sets the tone for teamwork, communication, and operational standards, helping to uphold the values and expectations of Surf Life Saving New Zealand. A Patrol Captain plays a crucial role in upholding SLSNZ's commitment to saving lives, developing people, and strengthening communities.

As a volunteer movement SLSNZ through support, leadership, resilience, and working as one team redefining our collective purpose to support our communities and our people – He Tangata. The Patrol Captain is central to bringing SLSNZ's vision to life. As frontline leaders, Patrol Captains embody the values of support, leadership, resilience, and teamwork every time they lead a patrol.

By fostering unity within the team, developing individuals through mentorship, and ensuring that patrols operate to the highest standards, Patrol Captains help strengthen the capability and confidence of the surf lifesaving movement in New Zealand.

Their leadership ensures that every patrol is more than just a service, it becomes a reflection of community care, shared responsibility, and commitment to protecting lives.

In this way, Patrol Captains are not just operational leaders, they are cultural ambassadors who turn the SLSNZ vision into real, meaningful actions on New Zealand Beaches.

Within a leadership context a Patrol Captain needs to,

- Lead and coordinate the patrol team
- Ensure safety and compliance
- Model effective leadership
- Communicate and liaise
- Mentor and develop team members

A Patrol Captain plays a key leadership role in maintaining safety, ensuring effective team function, and promoting a strong, supportive team environment.

Key responsibilities and duties of a Patrol Captain

Key Responsibilities – *these relate to what a Patrol Captain is accountable for (Broader and strategic)*

Key Duties – *these relate to the tasks that Patrol Captains must carry out. (Specific and operational) – how the responsibilities are carried out.*

Leading and coordinating the patrol team.

A Patrol Captain must have a strong grasp of key duties that must carry out to ensure effective, and safe patrol operations occur. These duties not only keeps patrols running smoothly, but also builds trust, promotes growth and strengthens team cohesion, all key to delivering high quality lifesaving services to our local communities.

Pre-patrol planning and briefing:

- Reviewing weather, tides, and surf conditions prior to patrol ensures that you and your patrol team understand the potential dangers before setting up the patrol. Planning sets a foundation for a safe proactive patrol rather than a reactive one.
- Conducting a pre-patrol team briefing to assign roles (e.g. tower watch, IRB, first aid, roving patrols) ensures that the patrol team knows their role, location and what is expected. Operational readiness means that a patrol team is organised, efficient and prepared. A Patrol Captain who displays leadership and delegation builds trust with their team, shows structures and empowers team members with responsibility.

- Setting clear expectations and goals for the patrol shift helps lifeguards stay focused and aligned with what success and high standards looks like. Developing a team culture reinforces professionalism and public image as well as encouraging learning and growth.

- **SWELL**
  Specific Tasks- Delegate and set up tasks.
  Wins – What has the team been doing well.
  Environment – Summary of beach conditions/ hazards. Risk Mitigation
  Look out for each other. Personal protection considerations/ wellbeing check ins.
  Learn and improve. Any recent challenges, key learnings, any training happening on patrol today?

Risk assessment and hazard identification

- Identifying potential hazards on the beach or in the water.
- Making informed decisions about flag placement, safe swimming zones, allocate resources and operational setup.
- Continuously reassessing conditions and updating the team accordingly

Risk Assessment	Task (Shared Responsibility – mentoring and engaging the VPC)	Frequency
Pre- Patrol Assessment	• Review and check local weather conditions, tide schedules and any potential weather warnings. • Review and check surf conditions. • Assess current beach conditions (rips, currents, shallow sandbanks tidal shifts) • Consider different environmental factors e.g. jelly fish, local iwi Rāhui restrictions to beach, changing tides. • Communicate hazards to the patrol team and public. • Brief the patrol team on any identified risks and hazards – areas to avoid, and increased areas of surveillance.	Before every patrol
Dynamic Risk Assessment	• Continuously monitor changing surf, weather and beach conditions during patrol. • Adjust the patrols coverage area and tasks based on evolving risks. • Ensure early detection of new risks (New rips forming, rapid weather changes, swimmer distress) • Communicate new risks and hazards to patrol team and ensure safety messages are given to the public.	Ongoing during patrol and as needed. Continuous and regular check ins required with patrol members.

	• Engage regularly with patrol members to report risks and then implement solutions. • Keep open lines of communication with the team encouraging members to report any new risks or changing conditions. • Make sure that team members are aware of the risks and their role in mitigating them.	
Post Patrol Assessment	• Collaborate to complete and finish Operational Risk Assessment in the Patrol App. • Review any incidents or near misses with the patrol team. • Report any damage to patrol equipment. • Reflect on daily risk assessment process and identify areas of improvement. • Adjust Strategies for any upcoming patrols based on feedback and changing patterns in beach and surf conditions.	After Patrol After Incident occurs (Report to Club)
Communication and shared responsibility	• Engage the entire patrol team in discussions about risk assessments, encouraging their input and ensuring shared commitment to identified risks and mitigation strategies. • Ensure that team members are clear on their individual roles and responsibilities regarding risk management. • Ensure that relevant safety information (e.g., dangerous areas, warnings, and surf conditions) are communicated to the public. • Make sure that public messaging (via signage, verbal announcements, or flag systems) is aligned with the identified risks.	On going during the patrol
Record Keeping and documentation	• Ensure all risk assessment, patrol activities, and patrol actions are accurately recorded using NSOP policy and procedures.	On going Ensure entries are closed after each patrol.

Ensuring safety and compliance

A Patrol Captain plays a critical role in following SLSNZ standards, maintaining public safety and manging risk.

Conducting risk assessments

- Evaluating beach and surf conditions (tides, rips, weather, hazards). Proactive risk management, informed planning and demonstrating sound, safety- based decision making in key for a Patrol captain.

- Identifying and responding to any environmental or situational risks. This includes responding quickly to changing or unexpected hazards, adjusting roles or alerting the patrol team of potential dangers to ensure team and public safety. A Patrol Captain who stays ahead of risks and makes sure their team does also by staying alert throughout the patrol and always applying situational awareness. Personally, conducting or delegating structured beach and surf scans every 20–30 minutes is recommended.

- Adjusting patrol operations (e.g. moving flags, limiting water access) based on changing conditions, ensures the Patrol Captain is maintaining operational flexibility by leading the patrol team through safe, logical adjustments as conditions evolve. Making decisions that may limit beach access to protect the public, and having the confidence to actively manage situations, calling the shots even the unpopular ones to keep your patrol team and public safe is key.

Ensuring correct patrol setup

- Setting up patrol areas according to SLSNZ guidelines, considering all documentation outlined in CSOPS. (correct flag placement, signage, equipment visibility). Reviewing placement of SLSNZ safety beach signage and ensuring flags are placed to mark the designated swimming area, considering tide, surf conditions and hazards, conducting a pre- patrol briefing to assign set up roles, and ensuring all rescue equipment is visible and positioned for quick access near the patrolled area are all important for a Patrol Captain.

- Ensuring visibility and accessibility of patrol members to the public. Assigning at least one patrol member to stand near the flagged areas, also positioning the patrol base / tent so that it is central and visible on the beach ensures accessibility to the public. Encouraging patrol members to engage with beachgoers.

- Confirming that surveillance points (e.g., tower or roving) are manned appropriately. It is important that the Patrol Captain is regularly checking each surveillance point to ensure that patrol members are alert, and each point has a designated lifeguard assigned. Adjusting patrol members and briefing the patrol team based on changing conditions is crucial especially if any new focus areas develop e.g.: suspected rips, hotspot swimmers, increased and crowded beach numbers.

Monitoring public safety

- Supervising swimmer behaviour and beach activity to prevent incidents by monitoring swimming zones continuously for signs of fatigue, distress, unsafe behaviour or developing hazards, and watching for emerging risks such as shifting rips. Directing patrol members to position themselves for optimum visibility and coverage and encouraging the use of tools like binoculars and radios support situational awareness. A continuous process of observing, interpreting, and anticipating events in the environment to effectively identify and respond to potential threats needs to be established amongst all patrol goers.

- Ensuring proactive interventions and clear communication with beachgoers occurs by the patrol team and early intervention with beachgoers entering unsafe areas, or showing risky behaviour is a critical responsibility of the PC. Supporting and modelling to the patrol team respectful communication, phrasing or approaches when addressing public, ensures interventions are calm, informative, and consistent across the patrol.

- Responding and coordinating promptly and effectively to rescues, first aid incidents, or preventions. Maintaining team discipline and ensuring the patrol team are ready to respond in optimal time is a key leadership responsibility of the Patrol Captain.

**Monitoring public safety is not passive,
it's about anticipating risk, leading visibility and engagement, and ensuring swift, coordinated responses. A Patrol Captain's guidance directly affects the effectiveness and professionalism of the patrol team.**

Maintaining equipment standards

- Checking, overseeing and delegating full inspection all lifesaving and first aid equipment (rescue tubes and boards, radios and communication gear, first aid kits and defibrillators, IRB (fuel, bungs, engine, safety gear) is present, functional, and ready for use is important. It is the Patrol Captains responsibility to ensure that everything being used on patrol is operational and functional.

- Ensuring IRBs, radios, and rescue tubes/boards meet SLSNZ safety requirements. Confirming equipment placement aligns with policy, and that all Patrol PPE (fins, fuel safety glasses, gloves) is available and being used correctly by all patrol members. Conducting mid patrol check ins to conforms radios are functioning, rescue gear remains in place and that the IRB, ATV, RWC are still rescue ready.

- Reporting any missing, damaged, or unsafe gear post patrol ensures the Patrol Captain has an oversight of any maintenance that is needed and can notify the clubs operations lead immediately. Supervising a thorough washdown, drying and storage of all equipment is ready for the next patrol, ensures longevity of assets.

Supervising team conduct and readiness

- Confirming all patrol members are in uniform, carrying the required qualifications, and fit for duty by checking correct uniform, ensuring that all the required personnel are present, and observing the patrol team are ready for patrol is a key responsibility as a pre patrol check as members arrive.

- Ensuring the patrol team is competent, briefed on beach conditions, hazards and will follow safe practices ensures that all patrol members understand their responsibilities and encourages the team to speak up if there is anything they are unsure of. Using down time to hold quick skill refreshers is an important way to maintain competency amongst the patrol team.

- Intervening unsafe behaviour, negligence, or non-compliance is observed by acting immediately if a patrol member is not wearing correct uniform while on patrol or is displaying unsafe conduct and ignores protocols is an important role of a Patrol Captain. Addressing these issues in professional, and constructive ways builds a culture of accountability and respect supporting patrol members to learn and improve rather than ignoring the issues. It is important to access club channels for support if needed.

Completing documentation and reports

- Accurately filling out all patrol logs, incident reports, equipment checklists and ensuring any incidents, injuries, preventative actions, public interactions, risks and hazards are documented and communicated as required by SLSNZ procedures is a critical part of a Patrol Captains responsibilities. Ensuring that all entries are clear, factual and completed accurately means that all patrol records are professional, reliable and usable for legal, safety and training purposes.

Complying with SLSNZ policies and procedures

- Following national and club-level protocols related to safety, emergency response, and public interaction.
- Ensuring any activities or decisions taken by the patrol align with legal and organisational responsibilities. Ensuring that patrol members are performing duties they are qualified for is critical.
- Staying updated on changes to SLSNZ standards and communicating them to the patrol team. Encouraging questions and offering clarifications ensures a shared understanding across the patrol team.

The importance of leadership - Why it matters?

A Patrol Captain's leadership directly impacts the safety of the public, the performance of their team, and the reputation of Surf Life Saving. It's one of the most visible and influential volunteer roles in the organisation.

Leadership is a core responsibility of a Surf Life Saving NZ (SLSNZ) Patrol Captain. It's not just about managing a patrol, it is about setting the standard, making decisions under pressure, and creating a safe, effective, and positive environment for both your team and the public.

- The Patrol Captain leads the team responsible for protecting lives.
- Strong leadership means quick, confident decision-making in emergencies, clear delegation, and efficient coordination during rescues.
- Patrol Captains lead by example, professionalism, preparedness, and communication all start at the top.
- A well-led patrol is focused, respectful, and engaged, which improves morale and performance.
- The public look to the Patrol Captain (and team) for guidance, especially in emergencies.
- Calm, clear leadership helps beachgoers feel safe and well-supported.
- Leaders uphold SLSNZ standards, procedures, and safety protocols.
- A strong Patrol Captain identifies risks, enforces expectations, and steps in when standards are not safeguarding the team and the organisation.
- A great Patrol Captain mentors and supports junior lifeguards, helping them grow in confidence and capability.

Leadership isn't just about being in charge—it's about growing others to lead in the future.

A Patrol Captains duty of care

A duty of care is the legal and ethical obligation to take reasonable steps to ensure the safety and well-being of others.

The Patrol Captain responsible for the safety of their patrol team members, the public, and ensuring that patrol operations are run competently and safely. They must act as a responsible leader, decision-maker, and risk manager during patrol.

Core Responsibilities linked to duty of care

Public Safety

- Ensuring beach users are protected through correct flag placement, hazard identification, and proactive prevention.
- Responding promptly and effectively to incidents, emergencies, and hazards.
- Communicating clearly with the public when delivering safety messages or instructions (e.g. closing swim areas due to rips or unsafe conditions).

Team Safety and Oversight

- Confirming patrol members are:
  - Qualified for their roles
  - Wearing proper uniform and safety gear
  - Physically and mentally fit for duty
- Providing briefings, assigning appropriate roles, and rotating members to manage fatigue.
- Intervening if a team member is at risk or behaving unsafely.

Compliance with Policies and Legal Standards

- Operating in accordance with SLSNZ patrol operations manuals, health and safety policies, and club protocols.
- Ensuring that all actions taken are defensible and in line with the law and organisational expectations.
- Accurately completing patrol logs, incident reports, and equipment checks to provide a record of responsible operation**.**

Sound Decision-Making and Risk Management

- Continuously assessing surf conditions, weather, and crowd behaviour.
- Adjusting patrol strategies based on changes to risk (e.g. moving flags, increasing surveillance, closing swim zones).
- Knowing when to escalate serious incidents and call for backup or emergency services.

Leadership, Communication, and Mentoring

- Leading with clarity and calmness, especially during emergencies.
- Supporting less experienced guards, role-modelling safe and professional behaviour.
- Keeping both the patrol team and beachgoers informed and reassured.

LEAD

This section outlines the skills and techniques needed to lead a high performing, engaged and motivated patrol team.

Leadership

In the dynamic and often high-pressured environment of Surf Lifesaving New Zealand, strong and adaptive leadership is vital. Whether you are leading a patrol on a busy summer day, coordinating a rescue response, or mentoring junior members, your ability to lead effectively has a direct impact on team safety, performance, and morale.

An effective leader provides guidance, instruction, direction and leadership to a group of individuals. Effective leadership contributes to ensuring high standards are met, improvements are implemented, and trust is built among members.

Using effective leadership in a patrol environment has many direct benefits:

- **Patrol readiness:** A well-led team is prepared and know their roles for the day. The patrol is organised and ready to respond to situations.
- **Operational safety:** Clear direction by a leader ensures safe and coordinated actions that are timely and cohesive.
- **Team cohesion:** A culture of respect, inclusion and shared responsibility is fostered which reduces conflict and increases team retention.

- **Public confidence:** When the public sees a well-led patrol, it builds trust in SLSNZ's capabilities and presence on the beach.

Fundamental principles of effective team leadership
Effective leadership in SLSNZ is grounded in five key principles:

1. **Clear communication**
   Providing instructions and feedback in a concise, respectful and inclusive manner is key to leading a team. Effective communication helps to keep your team informed during patrols, training and incidents.

2. **Leading by example**
   Modelling professionalism, vigilance and teamwork and upholding Surf Lifesaving New Zealand's values enable you to lead and develop the behaviours of others within your team.

   Understanding the Surf Lifesaving New Zealand context, NSOPs, CSOPs and ethical standards and modelling behaviours and decisions that are consistent ensures that team activities fit within the goals and objectives of the wider organisation and sets the team up for success.

3. **Situational awareness**
   Staying alert to changing beach conditions, team energy levels and public behaviours allows you to be adaptive and proactive in nature.

   This enables the Patrol Captain to make timely, quality decisions in a way that ensures a high likelihood of success.

   Part of the role of the Patrol Captain includes often dealing with serious situations that can be time/life critical. By maintaining situational awareness, the Patrol Captain can ensure they are making the right decisions and engage with the most appropriate personnel to ensure an appropriate response to the developing situation.

4. **Trust and delegation**
   Empowering team members with responsibility, showing trust in their skills, and delegating tasks based on capability and development goals encourages engagement and develops a sense in value the strengths and skills everyone brings to the team.

   To be influential and successful in leadership, Patrol Captains need to work with others and need the team to support their ideas, wisdom and energy. People often respond best to leaders when they feel respected. This means feeling listened to and being actively engaged in decision making and duties within their capability.

5. **Continuous learning**
   Seek feedback, reflect after patrols, and encourage team debriefs. Leadership includes the ability to grow and help others grow.

A healthy, effective and high performing team should continually reflect on and seek ways to improve own and team performance. This includes challenging assumptions they are making and frameworks they have for decision making.

Continuous learning and reflection and modelling the importance of this, motivates the team to continue to improve their collective skills and meet performance goals.

Leadership styles

Different situations and team compositions call for different leadership approaches. Being able to shift styles as needed is a hallmark of an effective Patrol Captain.

	Characteristics	When to use the style
Visionary leadership	Inspires. Believes in own vision. Empathetic. Explains how and why people's efforts contribute to the 'dream'.	When changes require a new vision. Or when a clear direction is needed. Radical change.
Coaching	Listens. Helps people identifying their own strengths and weaknesses. Counsellor. Encourages. Delegates.	To help competent, motivated team members to improve performance by building long-term capabilities.
Affiliative	Promotes harmony. Friendly. Empathetic. Boosts moral. Solves conflicts.	To heal rifts in a team. To motivate during stressful times. Or to strengthen connections.
Democratic	Superb listener. Team worker. Collaborator. Influencer.	To build support or consensus. Or to get valuable input from employees.
Pacesetting	Strong urges to achieve. High own standards. Initiative.	To get high-quality results and competent team. Sale.

	Low on empathy and collaboration. Impatience. Micromanaging. Numbers-driven.	
Commanding	Commanding – "Do it because I say so". Can be threatening. Tight control. Monitoring studiously.	In crisis or with a problem member. To start an urgent turn around. Traditional military style.

It is important to remember that the approach of the leader can positively or negatively impact the culture or atmosphere and performance of the team. The leader should adopt styles and approaches that are appropriate for the situation to maintain a high performing team.

Being adaptive and flexible in your leadership approach

Patrol teams are often made up of a diverse mix of individuals with differing experience levels, personalities and learning abilities. Ensuring the fundamental principles of effective leadership and utilising different leadership styles at the appropriate times, leaders can adapt and be flexible in their leadership to different team members and situations by:

- **Recognising strengths:** Assigning roles that match each member's abilities.
- **Coaching new members of the team:** Provide more structure and guidance to new lifeguards.
- **Challenge more experienced members:** Offer leadership opportunities to experienced guards, encouraging them to mentor newer or more junior members or performing more advanced skills within their capability and training level.
- **Stay flexible:** Adapt your leadership style to suit weather changes, incident severity or team fatigue.

Leadership in Surf Lifesaving is about influence, decision-making, and care for your team and the public. By developing versatile leadership techniques, you not only improve your patrol's performance but also grow future leaders within SLS.

Building and maintaining team cohesion

Effective leadership requires fostering of a positive team culture where members feel valued, supported and empowered. Patrol Captains play a vital role in motivating their teams through clear communication, positive reinforcement and leading by example.

By setting shared goals, celebrating team achievements, encouraging open dialogue and rotating responsibilities, leaders can enhance engagement and drive performance. Creating an environment where every team member understands their contribution and feels accountable helps ensure a safer and more cohesive patrol.

Team cohesion is critical on patrol, especially when quick decision and unified actions are required during rescues. Strategies to strengthen cohesion while on patrol include:

- Running pre-patrol briefings ensuring that everyone is on the same page, prepared and unified.
- Encouraging team-building activities.
- Establishing shared experiences and norms.
- Active listening
- Recognising individual strengths.
- Fostering mutual trust.
- Building rapport.
- Regular team debriefs and feedback sessions.

All the above strategies contribute to development of high-performing teams, inclusion, reflection and continuous improvement.

Trust and rapport
Building rapport and trust is critical to building and maintaining team cohesion.

Building rapport is like a bridge, the stronger the bridge, the more you can ask of it. Mutual trust and respect are the pillars upon which the bridge is built.

Mutual trust is a shared belief amongst us that we can depend on each other to achieve our purpose.

Rapport is the ability to make people feel comfortable and acceptable and this is a fundamental building block of successful leadership.

Patrol Captains can build rapport by:

- Showing concern for others. Ask questions to encourage conversation and learn about the persons thoughts and experiences.
- Trying to understand the other persons perspective and feelings.
- Mirroring posture and gestures of the other person to create a sense of connection and rapport.
- Actively listening.
- Finding common interests, experiences and goals to build a foundation for connection. Many Surf Lifesaving members share interest in the movement, however there may be other commonalities that can help to build rapport.

- Behave consistently and predictably/reliably. Follow through on your commitments and actions to build a sense of reliability and trust.
- Be your authentic self. Authenticity helps to build a genuine connection.
- Not being judgemental, overly self-conscious or overwhelm others with their views.

Trust is built when a person recognises trustworthy behaviour and becomes stronger and more resilient over time. Once trust is built and strengthened, strong emotional bonds exist, and people act effectively for the interest of one another. This allows teams to work and communicate more effectively.

Trust involves consistent actions that demonstrate integrity, reliability and competency, and can be built by demonstrating:

1. **Knowledge and skill.**
   A good leader knows a lot about their work and makes smart decisions. When a leader shows their knowledge and acts professionally, it helps others feel confident in them and builds trust.

2. **Consistency in actions.**
   Doing what you say and being consistent in how you act and communicate shows people they can rely on you. Owning up to your actions and learning from mistakes shows that you're humble and always trying to improve. It also makes people feel they can trust you, because you're honest and responsible.

3. **Alignment to the values we hold.**
   A leader builds trust by showing actions that match SLSNZ's values, rules, and mission. When a leader takes responsibility for what they do and keeps their promises, it builds trust within the team too.

Mentoring, coaching and growth

Supporting development is a large part of the Patrol Captains role and is part of building a strong patrol team. When someone struggles with their technique or is new to the role and is beginning skill development, leaders must respond with empathy, guidance, ongoing encouragement and support to aid the individual to achieve their obtainable goals.

To support growth, leaders can:

- Encourage shadowing.
- Assigning mentors.
- Providing opportunities for upskilling.
- Offer constructive feedback.
- Observe strengths and areas of improvement.

Conflict resolution

Conflicts can arise on patrol for many reasons. These reasons may include stress, miscommunication, unclear roles or stressful situations. Effective leaders address issues early and professionally using proven conflict resolution techniques including:

- Active listening.
- Neutral questioning.
- Finding common ground.
- Utilising a motivational approach where appropriate.
- Showing empathy.
- Being solutions focussed.
- Refocusing energy on collaboration and cohesion.

Maintaining a calm and objective approach helps de-escalate tensions while ensuring all parties feel heard and fostering mutual respect.

Motivational theory can be used to effectively deal with difficult or conflict situations and encourage individuals to proactively contribute to the resolution.

1. Pause and give time to consider your approach is able.
2. Encourage one to willingly change their own behaviour.
    a. Inform the person of the challenge that has occurred.
    b. Ask for and acknowledge the persons' perspective on the challenge.
    c. Explain why it is important.
    d. Encourage the person to devise their own plan for a solution.
    e. Provide feedback in an encouraging way.

Co-ordinate

This section outlines the knowledge and skills needed to manage and coordinate overall responses to minor and major incidents on a patrol.

Patrol management

Effective patrol management requires balancing of people, equipment, environmental factors and operational plans. Key components of co-ordinating and managing a patrol include:

- Personnel management: Knowing who is on patrol, their qualifications, experience and capabilities.
- Resource management: Understanding the availability and condition of rescue equipment (tubes, rescue boards, IRBs, radios, RWC, any other resources).
- Operational plans: Following Club Standard Operating Procedures (CSOPs) and National Standard Operating Procedures (NSOPs) along with the daily patrol set up.
- Risk assessments: Continuously evaluating conditions and performing risk assessment to inform patrol set up, management and resource allocation.
- Communication tools: Ensuring radios and contact systems are in place, and operational for effective communication within the patrol and externally.

Resources you may have on patrol and their pros and cons:

Rescue tube	• Always accessible. • Able to be identified easily be members of the public. • Useful for buoyancy to keep swimmers afloat.	• Is designed to be used in single patient circumstances.

	• Can be used in various circumstances and with other rescue tools/resources. • Hydrodynamic, they don't create much drag. • Secures a patient. • Easily stored.	• The clip is hard and can cause injury if not well managed. • The tube lanyard is long and if not controlled correctly could become tangled and/or cause damage to an IRB or RWC engine. • Susceptible to degradation.
Rescue board	• Quick response – can be quicker than swimming depending on conditions. • Good for buoyancy when there are multiple patients. • Can be used to fend off a panicked patient.	• The rescue board does not secure a patient. • Is designed to be used in single patient circumstances. • Require a high level of skill, depending on surf conditions. • Can cause injury if care is not taken, especially when in shore break.
IRB	• Versatile and can handle large surf conditions. • Can be operated for extended periods of time. • They are fast as they draw little water. • Can hold two or three patients. • Can be used as a raft to which many patients can cling until further support arrives in a mass rescue. • Can be used with limited risk near large crowds.	• Small open boats and driver and crew can be subjected to heavy bouncing over waves. • Require constant maintenance (although inexpensive). • Can be flipped if caught in the wrong position.
RWC	• Agile at low speedy. • Effective in large surf, around rocks and jetties. • Can be operated singularly. • Can easily be righted and restarted after capsizing. • Can be operated in shallow water. • Can be a rapid response to isolate areas and/or in support of a patrol incident if required. • Can be used to shepherd swimmers in the surf zone.	• High speed increases risk to operators and potentially beach users. • Weight can make it difficult to launch and retrieve. • Limited patient carrying capabilities depending on the individual craft and sled.

	• Can do single person rescues.	• Significant training and
ATV	• Able to roam the coastline and monitor the beach and water users. • Able to hold equipment and multiple people. • Enables quick access to difficult to reach areas. • Speeds up response times. • Enhances the visibility of lifeguards.	• Can cause risk to beach users and operators therefore careful use is required. • Can cause damage to dunes or wildlife if not responsibly used. • Limited load capacity. • Needs regular checks and servicing. • Can be a source of distraction.

Patrol team roles that may need filling on patrol and the level of capability required:

Flag duty	There must always be at least two (2) qualified and refreshed lifeguards – three if there is an IRB on patrol. must always be present during patrol. If there are members of the public swimming or wading between the flags, a qualified and refreshed surf lifeguard must be on the waters edge.
Mobile/roaming patrols	These can be on foot, on an ATV on Power craft. All mobile patrols should travel along the coastline monitoring the water/beach. Each mobile patrol should hold the appropriate qualifications and skills required to operate the method of mobile patrol. ATV mobile patrols must be a qualified and refreshed lifeguard and hold the appropriate driver's license.
IRB driver and crewperson	If an IRB is on patrol, a qualified and refreshed IRB Driver and Crewperson must also be listed on the patrol roster. The IRB Driver and Crewperson should remain available to respond and be within radio communication during patrol.
First aid	All lifeguards have a basic level of first aid, but some patrol members may have

	completed first aid training at a higher level. Patrol Captains should identify these members prior to the start of the patrol, and they should take over patient management in emergency situations.
VPC	A Vice Patrol Captain should hold the new Vice Patrol Captain award.
Tower	There should be a minimum of one lifeguard always stationed in a tower or elevated position during patrol. These members should be qualified and refreshed surf lifeguards. Lifeguards assigned to this role should not utilise their personal mobile
RWC Operator +/- crew	The operator must hold the RWC Operator award. All lifeguards crewing the RWC must have had a crew induction prior to crewing. It is NOT acceptable for a probationary RWC Operator to operate the RWC on patrol and in rescue situations.

Changing conditions

Situational awareness is a core skill required of patrol captains. Patrol captains should continuously monitor conditions, including changing weather conditions and surf conditions and proactively make patrol changes to ensure the safety of lifeguards and the public.

Examples of situational awareness and proactive patrolling:

- Moving patrol flags based on surf conditions, rips, or crowded area.
- Informing swimmers of change in flagged area location.
- Allocating patrol members to high-risk areas based on observed public behaviours.
- Updating hazard signage as conditions change.
- Increase surveillance or initiate proactive engagement when unsafe behaviour is observed.
- Closing the beach if conditions are too dangerous.
- Flying the danger flag from the club.
- Having an IRB on standby.

Response to incidents

Patrol Captains need to be ready to coordinate responses to a number of different situations that may unfold on the beach.

- Routine responses
  Routine responses on patrol involves managing common situations in a calm and structured manner. These incidents may include swimmers outside the flags, minor first aid events, lost children or public enquiries.
- Incident responses
  Incident responses require swift, decisive action to address high-risk situations where lives may be in immediate danger. These incidents include cardiac arrests, rescues, major trauma or missing persons in the water. These incidents demand rapid decision making under pressure, often in dynamic and unpredictable conditions.

A structured response to both routine and incident responses is vital to ensuring effective management of situations that occur on the beach and ensure that the correct level of response is launched considering the risk involved with the situation.

The following approach can be used to respond appropriately to all incidents:

1. **Recognise –** the first step to responding to an incident is to quickly identify the incident and dynamically assess the level of risk it poses to lifeguards, the people involved and the public.
2. **Assess –** determining the severity of the incident, the number of people involved and the potential hazards – gathering as much information as possible about the incident or event to ensure an appropriate response.
3. **Initial response –** Deploying the nearest appropriate resource.
4. **Plan –** take a moment to pause and plan which members of the team will be required, what resources will be required, what NSOP/CSOPs need to be adhered to, the path to manage the incident.
5. **Coordinate –** Lead the team (or allocate a leader if there is someone else more appropriate to lead the situation), allocate roles and maintain control of the scene.
6. **Communicate –** Request additional support via radio or other contact systems, communicate with lifeguards and those involved with the incident, complete incident logs to record actions.
7. **Handover/aftercare –** transfer the care of the incident to the appropriate person (fire, police, ambulance), provide ongoing support until incident is resolved, conduct debriefs, initiate wellbeing responses. Perform equipment checks and restock any equipment that was used.

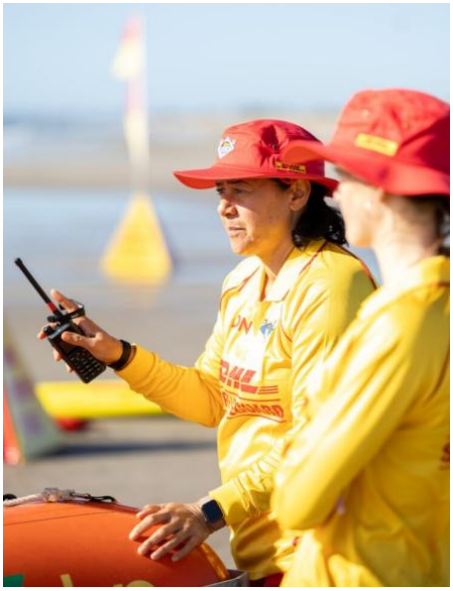
Major incidents

Major incidents may occur while on patrol – for example multi-casualty rescues, missing persons, major fires, body retrievals, natural disaster, shark attack. In these major incidents, surf lifeguards may be the first responders to an incident. Major incidents usually stretch the resources or emergency service personnel and are often deemed inter-agency responses.

The management of major incidents is not to dissimilar to responding to other incidents, however to manage these incidents effectively and in alignment with other emergency services, a Coordinated Incident Management System (CIMS) approach may be utilised. The principles of this approach are:

Command structure – common

The Patrol Captain should take the role of the Initial Incident Controller until other emergency services arrive. In this role, the Patrol Captain should lead the initial response, delegate tasks according to patrol capabilities, maintain oversight of safety and communicate with SurfCom who will engage the other resources required.

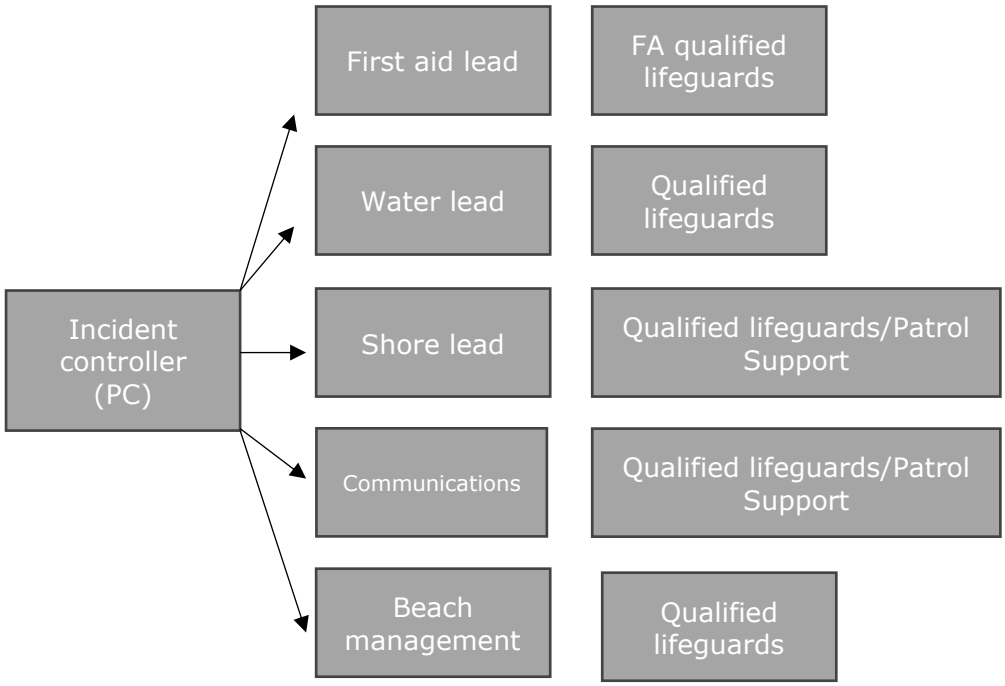


Be modular and scalable

A CIMS approach allows a response to grow with the size of the incident. The incident may start small and then expand as needed.

- The Patrol Captain should assign lifeguards to lead roles where appropriate (for example, an operations leader, a first aid leader, a communications leader).
- The Patrol Captain may need to set up sectors should the incident be large enough – for example, water, shore, first aid areas.
- Escalate to Search and Rescue or Police through SurfCom as necessary.

An example command structure is below.



Maintain incident control

The Patrol Captain must maintain control until the lead agency arrives – Fire, Police, Ambulance, Coastguard etc. To maintain control, the Patrol Captain should establish where they are going to lead from (i.e. the lifeguard tower or from beside the IRB on shore). The Patrol Captain will log all actions and decision and decide on the priorities throughout the incident – where resources need to be first and what resources need to be where.

Use of these principles can assist Patrol Captains to confidently and professional manage these incidents and enable a smoother integration with emergency services.

Operations Management

The Patrol Captain should task team members appropriately and within their capabilities. This means there may be a lead person in different roles, overseeing other members performing the same roles. Patrol members should be rotated if the incident is prolonged.

Specific operations management principles of different incidents can be round in the NSOP/CSOPs.

If beach users remain at the beach, there should be sufficient resources to maintain normal patrol duties. If this is not possible, the beach should be closed using the normal procedure.

Communications

During any major incident, clear and timely communication is essential.

- Radios should be utilised effectively to communicate between team members.
- Structured updates should be provided to Surf Com and other agencies.
- Ensure all patrol members understand and follow the correct communication flows that you have set up, for example speaking to the lead of the situation or speaking directly to you.

Handovers

A structured handover should be provided for any agency that is taking over the incident. A patient handover to ambulance staff includes:

I – Identification.

M – Mechanism of injury / medical complaint.

I – Injuries / information related to the complaint.

S – Signs and symptoms.

T – Treatment and trends.

A – Allergies.

M – Medications.

B – Background.

O – Other issues.

The handover of a major incident involves:

- A summary of the incident and actions taken.
- The exact incident location and current operations.
- A timeline of events.
- Additional information, including number of patients, condition of the patient, resources being used, known hazards etc.

Decide

This section outlines the knowledge and skills needed to make complex decisions while considering a specific situation and patrol capability.

As a Patrol Captain you will be required to make decisions in dynamic and high-pressured environments. These decisions must balance SLSNZ Standard Operating Procedures and the real-time context of the situation – including weather, surf conditions, available resources, and team capability.

Complex decision making requires more than just quick thinking; it demands structured reasoning, risk assessment and the ability to lead with clarity and confidence. Good decisions reflect professional standards and build trust within the patrol.

Part of decision making includes problem solving, which is the Patrol Captains responsibility. Problem solving means identifying issues early, gathering the relevant information, generating options, evaluating risks and benefits and selecting the best course of action.

Patrol Captains should be adaptable and draw on experience while also engaging with others when appropriate. Effective problem-solving underpins all strong leadership.

There are several decision-making models that can be used by Patrol Captains in a range of different situations. Each approach offers a structured process to help Patrol Captains make sound decisions – especially in high-pressure, time-critical, or complex situation.

STOP Model
The STOP decision making model encourages pausing and structuring planning and is particularly useful for complex, escalating or unfamiliar situations. It may not be suitable for situations that require quick thinking depending on how long it takes to move through each phase of the process.

S – Stop
- Take a moment to stop and pause. This allows you to slow the situation down, assess safety and avoid panic or impulsive reactions and decisions. This phase often is a split-second response to gather thoughts.

T – Think
- Consider what has happened, what the problem or challenge is, what the potential consequences are and any risks to your patrol, the public or yourself.

O – Observe
- Gather the relevant information that you require – for example, the surf conditions, patrol capability, public activity, available resources and any hazards of changing factors.

P – Plan
- Use the information you have gathered to make clear, considered decisions. Communicate your plan to the team, assign roles and take confident and deliberate actions.

STAR Model
The STAR decision making model offers the benefit of a review at the end of the incident which lends itself to a process of continuous learning therefore allowing individuals and patrols to enhance their skills and learn from the situation. This is a good general decision-making and reflection tool that supports reflective decision making.

This structured approach is good for day-to-day patrol leadership decisions, minor incidents, or serves as a good tool to use for debriefing.

S – Stop
- Take a moment to pause and acknowledge the decision that needs to be made. This allows you to slow down, assess any safety measures and avoid panic or impulsive reactions and decisions. This phase is often a split-second response to gather thoughts.

T – Think
- Consider your options. What information do you have, what are your patrol capabilities and what are the potential consequences of each option that you have?

A – Act
- Choose the best course of action and implement it. Communicate effectively with the team and adapt if needed.

R – Review/Reflect
- After the incident or decision reflect on what happened – what worked well, what could have been improved? What should be done differently next time?

ACT Model
The ACT decision making model is a fast, clear and practical approach and is good for making quick decisions in active patrol situations. It is especially useful to make clear, rapid choices and decisions.

A – Assess
- Determine what the situation is – gather key information you require, for example surf conditions, people involved, hazards present, available resources.

C – Consider
- Consider what your options are and making sure to evaluate your patrol capability, safety, NSOPs and CSOPs and potential outcomes.

T – Take Action
- Decide on the safest and most effective course of action and implement it. Act promptly, communicate and monitor progress and the outcome.

Situational awareness is key to sound decision-making. This includes constantly monitoring patrol numbers, capabilities, equipment status, hazards, beach conditions and public behaviour. Good Patrol Captains and leaders integrate this information in real-time to adjust plans, reposition personnel, or escalate incidents when necessary. An informed decision-maker avoids assumptions and ensures that their actions align with the operational reality on the beach.

After any patrol, incident or major incident, reviewing performance is crucial for growth and continuous improvement. Patrol Captains should facilitate debriefs, utilising peer supporters and duty officers where required to encourage open reflection, assess what went well, and identify areas for development. This process helps to refine patrol strategies, improve communication, and develop the decision-making abilities of both the leader and the wider team.

Structured reflection ensures the review firstly puts the team first and second ensures the review leads to actionable insights. There are several models of reflection that a Patrol Captain can use to reflect themselves and assist the team to reflect upon the situation and performance.

What? So What? Now What?
This is a simple reflective model that promotes critical thinking and learning from an experience.

This model is good for end of patrol reviews and team reflection sessions as it encourages structured reflection, factual thinking and actionable improvement.

What?
What happened? Describe the situation factually.

So what?
Why does it matter? What were the impacts, successes or issues that were encountered?

Now what?
What will we do next time? What lessons have been learned?

Gibbs' Reflective Cycle
This is a deeper, cyclical model that is often used for training debriefs, critical incident reflection or development planning. It supports emotional insight and learning, rather than simply an operational review.

Description
What happened? Describe the situation factually.

Feelings
How did you feel and what were others experiencing?

Evaluation
What was good or bad about the experience?

Analysis
Why did things happen that way?

Conclusion
What can be learned?

Action plan
What would you do differently next time?

Record

This section outlines the policies, procedures, and technology for effective risk management in patrolling situations.

As a Patrol Captain, it is essential to understand and apply the National Standard Operating Procedures (NSOPs) and Club/Service Standard Operating Procedures (CSOPs).

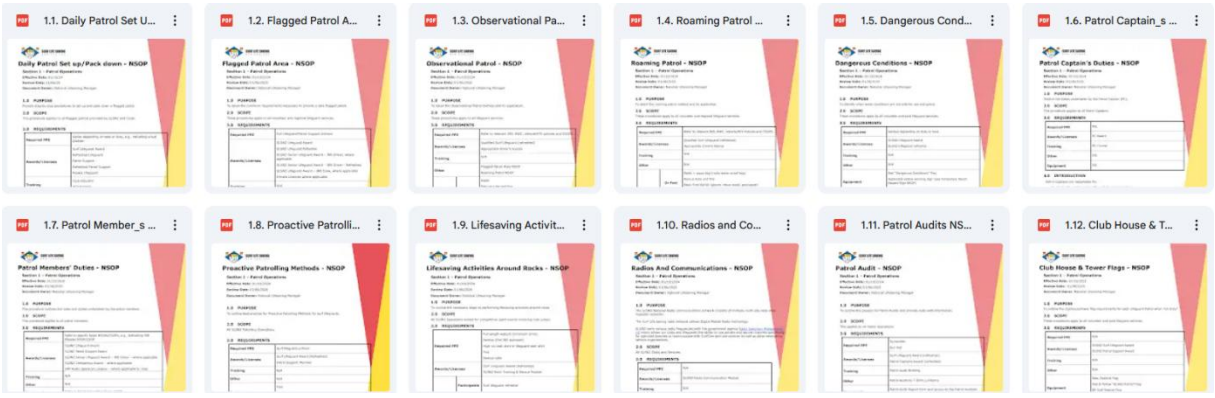
These guidelines provide structured protocols for effective surf lifesaving operations, ensuring consistency, safety, and compliance with Surf Life Saving New Zealand (SLSNZ) standards.

In general, an operating procedure is a set of step-by-step instructions compiled to help lifeguards/members/volunteers carry out operations with consistency across all operations.

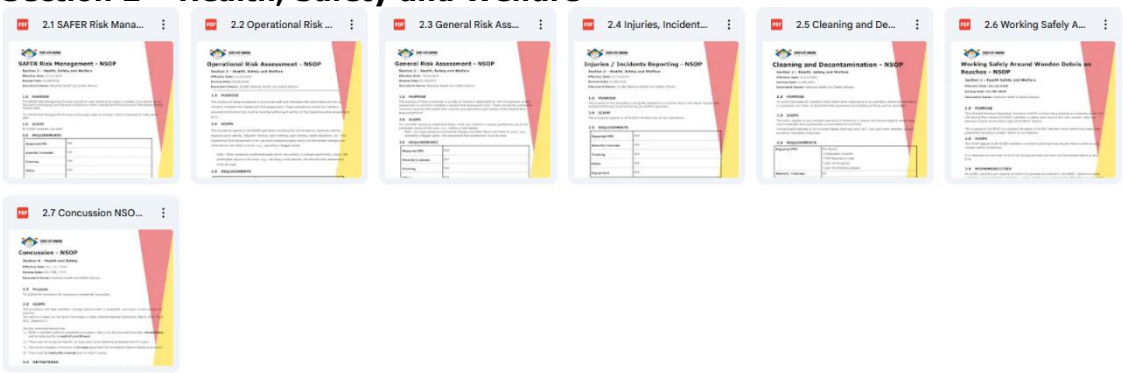
National Standard Operating Procedures (NSOPs)

Situations where NSOPs are relevant for PCs and VPCs:	
Major Rescues & Emergency Response: (Section 2, 6, 7)	NSOPs provide clear protocols for **responding to** minor first aid, major first aid, CPR, missing persons, rescues, post critical incidents.
Patrol Setup and Operations: (Section 1)	PCs and VPCs must follow NSOPs to ensure patrol areas, flags, and rescue equipment are set up and closed down correctly, and appropriate roles are assigned to patrol team.
Use of Equipment & Safety Standards: (Section 1,3,4)	NSOPs cover procedures for IRB operations, radios, first aid, and other essential lifesaving gear.
Inter-club or Multi-agency Response: (Section 1, 6,7 9)	If an incident requires coordination through SURFCOM with emergency services (Police, Coastguard, Ambulance, SAR), NSOPs guide communication and collaboration.
Health, Safety and Welfare Compliance: (Section 2)	NSOPs ensure that lifeguards operate under safe conditions, management of fatigue, sun exposure and stress, and follow SLSNZ's risk assessment and management guidelines. Correct reporting procedure to SLSNZ databases are also outlined.

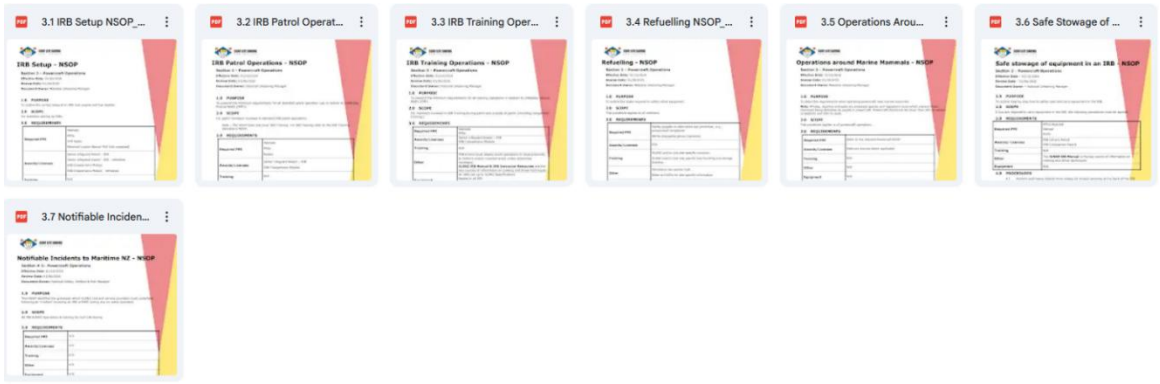
Section 1 – Patrol Operations (Pre, start, and end of patrol)



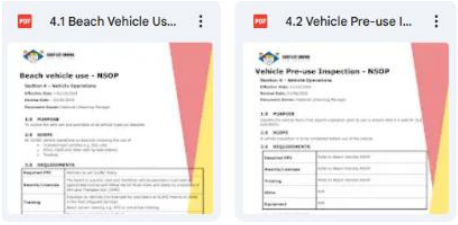
Section 2 – Health, Safety and Welfare



Section 3 – Power Craft Operations

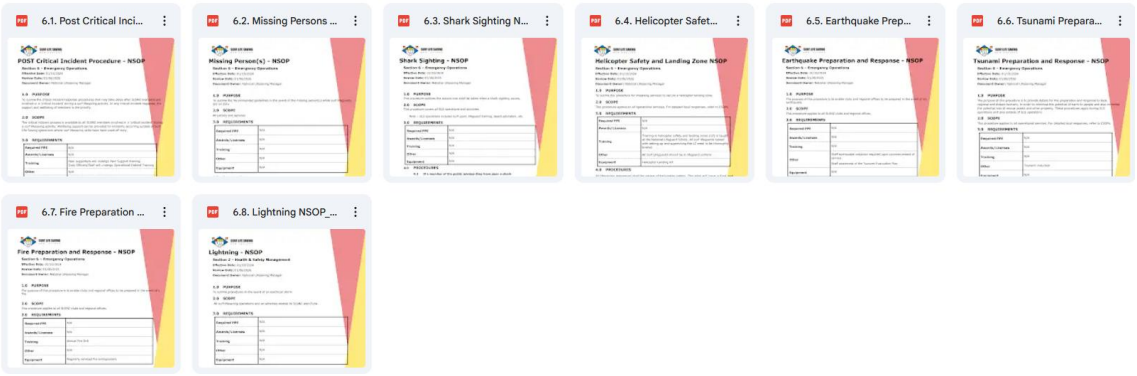


Section 4 – Vehicle Operations

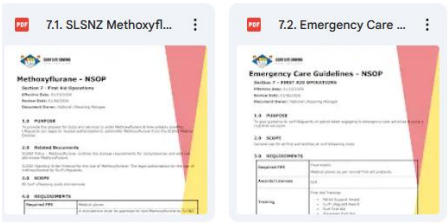


Section 5 – Information, Communication, Technology

Section 6 – Emergency Operations



Section 7 – First Aid Operations



Section 9 - SAR Operations

HSMS Level	Level One	Level Two	Level Three	Level Four
SAFER	✓	✓	✓	✓
General Risk Assessment		✓	✓	✓
Operational Risk Assessment			✓	✓

It is important that we understand who is overseeing the health and safety of all events and activities we take part in.

"While all operational members of Surf Life Saving are accountable to aspects of health and safety in different environments, the degree of understanding is varied - very few are expected to know it all."

All Vice Patrol Captains operate at level two. Patrol Captains operate at Level three. SLSNZ provides us with tools, training, and support for risk management.

Level Three builds on the operational health and safety skills and competencies required for Level Two. This level is for those leading and managing SLS services and/or operational personnel and contractors. This advanced-level content provides comprehensive information on SLSNZ's health and safety risk management systems across a range of operational contexts and systems including emergency response plans and auditing processes.

Level Three Target Audience

- Advanced Lifeguards
- Patrol Captains
- Level 3 Surf Officials
- Instructors
- Examiners
- Facilitators
- Coaches
- RWC Operators.

Level Three Resources and Content

Those who sit in Level Three of the Health and Safety Management System need to understand the following content:

1. SLSNZ Health and Safety Manual (pdf)
2. SLSNZ Policies - Lifesaving, Sport & Health & Safety
3. National Standard Operating Procedures (NSOPS)
4. Template - Activity Safety Manual
5. The Member Protection Toolbox

The SAFER Model

At the heart of our Health and Safety Management System is our SAFER approach to risk management. SAFER helps guide and reinforce the fundamental concept of risk management, which even our youngest lifeguards should be familiar with and be able to implement for regular lifeguard tasks and duties.

SAFER is an easy to remember approach to identifying hazards and risks and encourages users to consider control measures to fix the problem to prevent harm to people. Risk management and assessment are essential components of what we do as lifeguards. Understanding, remembering and utilising a SAFER approach to risk management is an important first step to providing for your safety as well as the safety of others.

The eight steps to risk management

The eight steps to risk management provides a structured process for identifying and controlling risks. Following the process below ensures a consistent and thorough approach to risk management that aligns with national standards.

Step 1 – Identify the activity
Step 2 – Identify the people
Step 3 – Identify the hazards
Step 4 – Assess the risks
Step 5 – Apply preventative actions
Step 6 – Monitor
Step 7 – Maintain
Step 8 – Implement emergency response.

Operational Risk Assessment (ORA)

Operational Risk Assessment must be completed for all Patrol Operations via the SLSNZ Patrol App. The Operational Risk assessment accurately documents information allowing for:

- Trends to be tracked in beach safety.
- Improved resource allocation.
- Reviewing of operational effectiveness.
- Strengthened training and policy development.

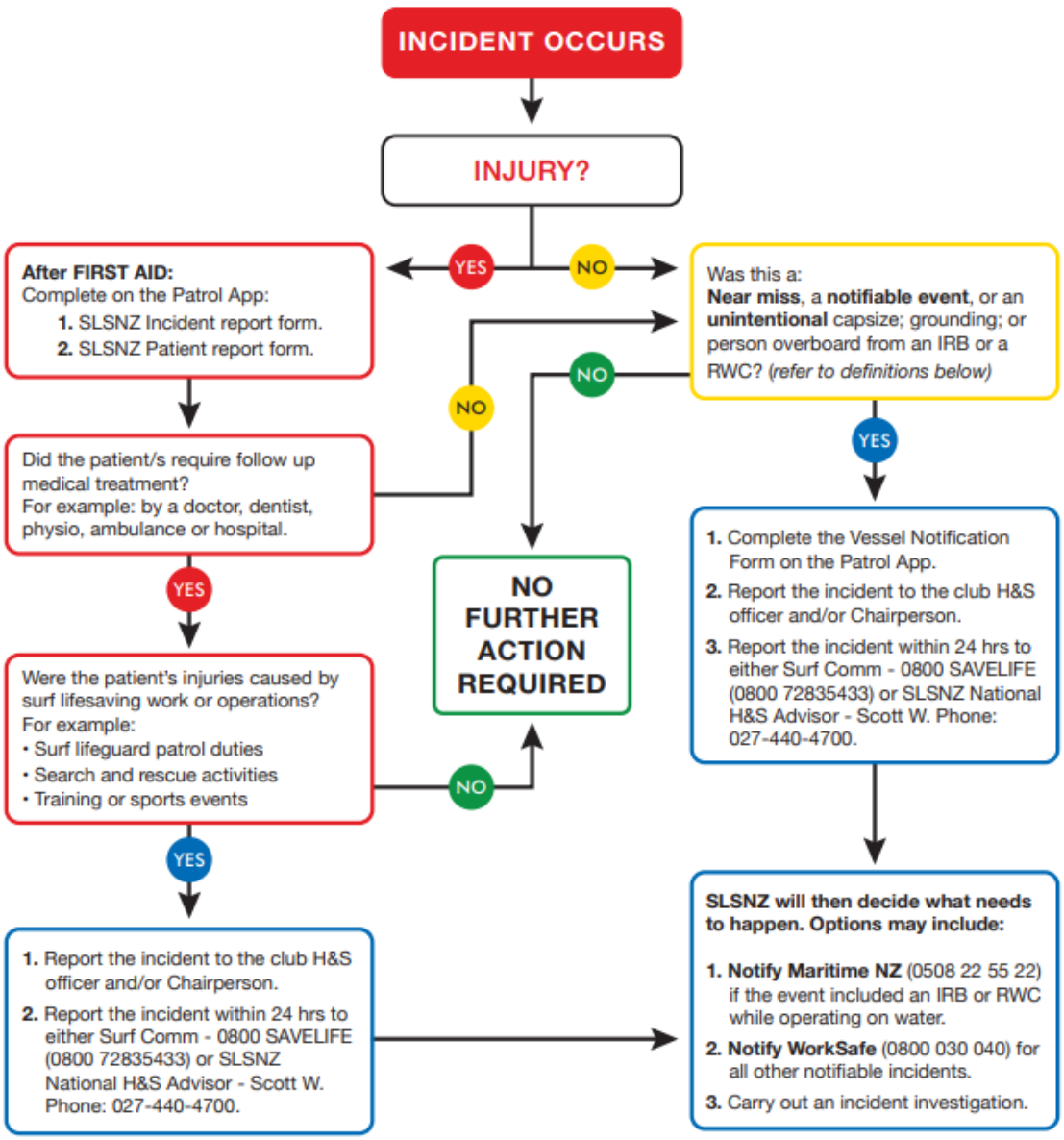
As part of this process, the following should be recorded:

- Preventative actions, rescues and first aid events.
- Detailed environmental and surf conditions, especially if they influence safety decisions.
- Outcomes and actions taken in response to specific circumstances.

Risk Control

Most hazards in our patrol environments are unable to be eliminated or removed i.e. surf conditions, weather conditions, the rocks at our beaches. Instead, we must consider how we chose to interact with these hazards or protect others from interacting with the hazards.

SLSNZ INCIDENT & INJURY NOTIFICATION FLOW CHART



DEFINITIONS

Near miss - an unplanned or uncontrolled event that does not result in harm, but in slightly different circumstances may have resulted in harm.

Notifiable events includes:

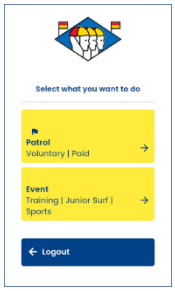
- **Notifiable death** – when a person has been killed as a result of work.
- **Notifiable incident** – Is an unplanned or uncontrolled incident in the workplace that exposes a worker, or any other person to a serious health or safety risk.
- **Notifiable injury** - a significant injury resulting in the person needing to stay in hospital overnight.

May 2024

SURF LIFE SAVING NEW ZEALAND

Patrol App

Vice Patrol Captains can support the Patrol Captain and also teach the patrol team to enter their patrol data directly into SLSNZ data base. This removes the need for your club to manually keep track of paper, ensures all members on patrol are refreshed and helps you as a patrol leader to understand the capability of your patrol.



Surf Lifeguards should spend time with the you to familiarise themselves with how to use the Patrol App. This can be done by using training mode.

The Surf Patrol App works through a start of activity report which includes the Patrol Captains report form and the Operational Risk Assessment.

Once this has been completed Surf lifeguards can then fill in an Incident Report Form, a Vessel Notification Form, and the Patrol Observations (headcounts, and preventative actions).

At the conclusion of patrol duties or activity, Surf Lifeguards need to complete the End of Activity Report which is a sign off process for the Patrol Captains Report Form. Information that is entered into the Patrol App can also be monitored in real time by SurfCom.

The types of forms in the Patrol App.

- **The Patrol Captains Report Form:**

The patrol captain's report form is used to capture key patrol information. This includes surf lifeguards involved, members of the public, weather conditions, patrol equipment, incidents, and any preventative actions.

- **Incident Report Form:**

The incident report form is used to record information on rescues, searches, first aid and any other incident a surf lifeguard may respond to. This also includes any incidents during lifesaving sport events. All injuries to any club member or member of the public must be reported.

- **Patient Report Form:**

The patient report form is used to record individual patient details, treatment, vital signs and any search information. These forms must be filled out for all major rescues, first aid and searches.

Definitions:

Patrol
Voluntary patrol: Volunteer surf lifeguards that perform a patrol.
Paid lifeguard: Surf lifeguards that are employed to provide patrols.
Callout: Any response to an emergency occurring outside normal patrol hours.

Event
Beach Education: Regionally delivered beach or community education programme.
Junior Surf: Club delivered Junior Surf Programme
Lifeguard Training: Training activities or exams for Lifeguards including Rookies, IRB and SAR.

Sport Training: Lifesaving sport training activities
Competition: Event safety for club, regional or nationally delivered Lifesaving Sport competitions and carnivals.

External Event: Event safety for external events (e.g. Local Triathlon)

Ways to lead, engage and teach other patrol members to use the Patrol App Confidently

- Lead by example
- Explain the why
- Do a walkthrough mini workshop using training mode
- Let other take ownership under you supervision so it becomes a shared responsibility.
- Use friendly reminders ("Hey let's not forget to log …….")
- Coach privately if needed
- Share the SLNZ Patrol APP user guide prior to your patrol duty day.
- Debrief with a digital follow up.

Care

This section outlines the various support systems available and how to utilise these to lead and support patrol operations.

Self-care and prioritising own wellbeing

As a Patrol Captain (PC), self-care is crucial for maintaining peak performance, effective leadership, and ensuring the safety of yourself, your team and the public. By looking after your own wellbeing and engaging in self-care activities you also prioritise the needs of others and set an example of the importance of self-care and wellbeing to other patrol members, promoting a healthy team culture.

Physical wellbeing and the role of PC

Days in the sun, challenging rescues, and physical patrols require you to be in top shape. It is important to look after your physical wellbeing to maintain your own and public safety.

Hydration, proper nutrition and rest help prevent fatigue and exhaustion.

Regular fitness training ensures you can respond effectively to emergencies.

Identifying when you or someone else needs support

Mental and emotional resilience

Decision making under pressure is a key part of the role of the PC and VPC, and stress can cloud judgement.
Taking breaks, practicing mindfulness, or engaging in stress-reducing activities can enhance focus.

Avoiding burnout and mental and emotional fatigue or stress allows you to stay engaged, approachable and proactive.

Managing personal workload and preventing burnout
Balancing patrol duties with personal time is essential to sustaining personal passion, motivation and commitment.

Knowing when to delegate tasks ensures smoother operations and prevents overloading yourself.

Recognising signs of exhaustion early allows for proactive management.

Enhancing team morale and safety
A leader who prioritises well-being fosters a healthier team culture.

Encouraging rest and self-care among patrollers reduces fatigue-related mistakes.

Promoting open communication about stress ensures a supportive environment.

Support systems

Support systems are essential in surf lifesaving because they provide emotional, mental and operational backing needed to maintain resilience and effectiveness in a demanding role.

Roles in Surf Lifesaving can be physically exhausting and mentally taxing, requiring split-second decision-making under pressure, exposure to traumatic incidents, and ongoing leadership responsibilities. Having a strong support system – whether through other patrol members, mentors, club leadership, SLSNZ staff or external professionals – ensures that any surf lifesaving member can process challenging experiences, manage stress and prevent burnout.

Support networks also foster teamwork, improve communication, and create a culture where members feel valued, heard and encouraged to seek help when needed. By encouraging healthy support, wellbeing can be enhanced, morale boosted and ensure that those who dedicate themselves to protecting others are also cared for.

SLSNZ support systems are not just for SLSNZ related challenges or stress, but also for general wellbeing in any area of life.

Recognising the need for support in yourself and others
It is the role of the PC and VPC to recognise the need for support, both in themselves and others, to maintain wellbeing. Once a need for support is recognised, a VPC and PC should connect themselves or others with the appropriate level of support.

Key things to look out for:

- Persistent feelings of stress, anxiety, or sadness.
- Feeling overwhelmed, irritable, or emotionally drained.
- Difficulty concentrating or making decisions.
- Loss of motivation or passion.
- Withdrawing from other members, friends or family.
- Increased frustration, short temper or more frequent conflicts with others.
- Avoiding duties, training or other responsibilities.
- Turning to unhealthy coping mechanisms, such as excessive alcohol use.

- Fatigue or trouble sleeping.
- Headaches or other stress related symptoms.
- Changes in appetite (too much or too little).
- Increase mistakes or slower response times in emergencies.
- Feeling disconnected or becoming disinterested.
- Flashbacks, nightmares or persistent distress about past incidents.
- Fear or anxiety about performing duties.
- Difficulty processing a recent rescue, injury or fatality.

If a PC or VPC notices any out of the ordinary behaviour, or signs of stress as a result of a SLS incident, or outside stressor, they should check in with the member, offer support and discuss individual options for support.

After critical incidents, PC's and VPC's should work together to activate the normal support systems that SLSNZ offer.

Peer support
Peer supporters are specially trained SLSNZ members who can provide support to their fellow members (peers) on a range of issues including mental health concerns, bullying, stress and traumatic lifesaving incidents.

Peer supporters play an important role in post-incident support and may be called on to attend post-incident debriefs and assist with following up members that have been involved in traumatic incidents. A crucial part of the peer support role is to be able to link members with the support they need to manage their wellbeing.

Peer support details can be found on the member portal and on the wall of every Surf Club.

Peer support following a critical incident
Peer support will be activated by SurfCom after every critical incident that lifeguards are involved in regardless of the number of lifeguards, level of involvement and seniority of lifeguards.

Peer support in this instance will attend the critical incident debrief, along with the Duty Officer, to ensure that all lifeguards are aware of the follow up process and the wellbeing procedures that are in place to help them.

It is the duty of the PC to ensure that communication with SurfCom is as per protocols to ensure these support pathways are automatically unlocked.

Duty officers
Duty officers are a support system that is activated by SurfCom when a critical incident occurs on the beach. There are differing levels of Duty Officer as listed below:

Local duty officer
A local duty officer is reflex tasked which means that they are activated to support when an incident occurs. Local duty officers provide guidance when responding to incidents, facilitate operational debriefs and assist in communicating with SurfCom and external agencies.

Regional duty officer
Regional duty officers support patrols during major incidents. They provide SurfCom with regional information, assist in communicating with SurfCom and external agencies and manages "on scene" media enquiries as required.

National duty officer
National duty officers are highly experienced lifeguards, and they use their knowledge and skills to support SurfCom. They provide guidance on SLSNZ policy and procedure ensuring situational awareness across all lifesaving operations. They act as an intra/interagency liaison.

The PC should ensure communication with SurfCom is as per protocols to ensure the appropriate level of duty officer is tasked for the situation that is occurring at the beach. PC's and VPC's should make sure that patrols know the role of duty officers and the support they are able to provide.

TELUS health
TELUS health (previously called Benestar) is the counselling and wellbeing provider for SLSNZ members and their immediate families.

TELUS Health offers support after traumatic incidents that occur within SLS and any challenges within SLS clubs. TELUS Health also provides support for personal issues such as stress and anxiety, as well as family issues such as violence, grief and hardship.

Confidentiality underpins this service.

VPCs and PCs should encourage use of TELUS Health by patrol members or themselves as the need arises.

To access TELUS Health, see the details on the SLSNZ website.

Other support systems
While Surf Lifesaving New Zealand provide many formalised support systems there are multiple other informal supports that are available to assist patrol members who may be involved in traumatic incidents or have other stressors occurring in their life.

The club as a social space, and peers play a vital role as a support system during stressful times, often offering understanding, reassurance, support and shared experience that can help ease mental and emotional strain. Fellow lifeguards are in a unique position to provide empathy and in some cases guidance in these situations. This support structure helps to build connection and ensures that no one is isolated in their struggles. Encouraging open communication and a culture of mutual support within the club and patrol can make a significant difference in managing stress and preventing burnout.

As a VPC or PC, you often offer support to other patrol members by creating a safe space for open discussions and ensuring overall wellbeing of all members. The VPC or PC will often aid in debriefing following incidents, be a source of support for personal challenges and often checking in on individuals' wellbeing.

As well as the social support within the club, family and friends play an important role in the support systems and structures of individual members. During times of stress encouragement to engage with other family and friends is important to ongoing support. Family and friends can provide outside, or wider perspectives and they know often the individual well and allow a safe place to decompress outside of patrol duties. Family and friends often assist by providing a listening ear, reassurance and motivation to move through any challenges. They often also remind members of their value both in surf lifesaving and outside of their role.

As a Patrol Captain, you are not expected to carry the emotional or mental load of patrol incidents alone.

Your role includes recognising when you or your team need support, knowing how to access the right services, and guiding others to do the same.

This ensures a culture of wellbeing, resilience, and safety within the Surf Life Saving environment.

Recognising the need to initiate support systems

Action Plan

How this looks:

- After a traumatic incident (e.g. resuscitation, drowning, spinal, body recovery), you're alert to signs of distress in yourself or others.
- You observe:
  - Withdrawal or shock
  - Visible stress or upset
  - Changes in behaviour or communication

- You check in and debrief with the team after the incident:

"How are you doing after that?
"Anything you want to talk about?"

- If someone is struggling, you encourage them to talk it through or suggest accessing support.

Know how to access peer support and duty officers
How this looks:

- Immediately after a serious incident, you:
  - Contact the Duty Officer for your region
  - Ask for Peer Support to be initiated if appropriate
- You ensure any incident reporting is completed, but also follow up with a welfare lens:

"We've got this logged. I'll let the Duty Officer know someone from Peer Support should get in touch."

- You store or display the relevant contact numbers in the patrol base (Duty Officer, Regional Office, Peer Support contact).

Be able to advise patrol members on how to access TELUS Health
How this looks:

- You let your team know that TELUS Health (formerly EAP) is available for all SLSNZ members and volunteers.

You explain:

To access TELUS Health counselling by telephone
Call 0800 360 364. State you are from Surf Lifesaving and accessing as part of the Xero Assistance Program.

Or to access TELUS Health counselling online, head to:
https://findacounsellor.telushealth.com/
When directly booking a counsellor from website, make sure you say that you are accessing as part of the Xero Assistance Program.

**Family members are classified as 'immediate family members living in the same household'.*

The TELUS Health counselling support for SLSNZ members is available to provide short term support to members to assist with challenges they may be facing. Sessions are provided in batches of two.

TELUS Health offers two session per issue for our members. For further support for Surf Life Saving related issues (i.e. Critical Incident Support), please contact the National Wellbeing Lead in confidence where further funded support can be arranged.

TELUS Health offers support after traumatic SLS incidents, challenges within SLS Clubs and provides support for personal issues such as stress and anxiety, as well as family issues such as violence, grief, and hardship. Support is provided through expert clinicians, counsellors and advisors either face-to-face, via phone, video, learning modules, online live chat, and through the TELUS Health app.

Confidentiality underpins this service. SLSNZ has no access to any information about who accesses this service.

You provide reassurance:

"You don't need to go through the club — it's totally private. If something's on your mind, just give them a call."

- You keep TELUS Health **details visible in** the patrol base or saved in your phone for easy sharing.

Using SLSNZ support systems means you are proactive, informed, and ready to support your team's wellbeing after challenging situations.

You don't have to be a counsellor, but you do need to recognise when help is needed and connect people with it.

Check List

Be Aware and Observant

- Monitor your team for signs of stress, fatigue, or distress — especially after major incidents.
- Check in with team members during and after patrol:

"How are you feeling after that rescue?"

"How did that all sit with you?"
"Do you feel okay about what happened?"

Respond Supportively

- Create space for conversations. Be calm, non-judgemental, and open.
- Encourage the person to talk with someone they trust or seek support.
- Don't dismiss concerns — early support is better than waiting too long.

Access Peer Support and Duty Officer

- Know who your **Duty Officer** is and how to contact them.
- After serious incidents, contact the Duty Officer and request **Peer Support** if needed.
- Ensure the team knows Peer Support is safe, confidential, and non-judgemental.

Promote TELUS Health (Formerly EAP)

- Remind team members that TELUS Health is free and confidential for all SLSNZ members.
- Know how to access it:
  0800 360 364
- Reassure team members:

"You don't need permission, just reach out if you need to."

Lead by Example

- Take care of your own mental and physical wellbeing.
- Show that it's okay to ask for help — leadership includes vulnerability. This builds trust and connection with your patrol team, encouraging them to speak up before things escalates and creates a culture of safety, empathy and accountability.
- Demonstrate that seeking help is strong not shameful and encourages others to do the same.
- Talk openly about support as part of normal patrol operations and debriefs.

Keep Information Visible

- Print and display in the patrol base.
- Save contact numbers in your phone.
- Include reminders in your patrol briefings.