

**NATIONAL
JUSTICE
PROJECT**



Public
Interest
Advocacy
Centre

The Shopfront
YOUTH LEGAL CENTRE



New South Wales
Council for Civil Liberties



Human
Rights
Law
Centre



cc The Hon. Yasmin Catley MP, Minister for Police and Counter-terrorism
cc The Hon. Ryan Park MP, Minister for Health
cc The Hon. Rose Jackson MLC, Minister for Mental Health

September 27 2023

Dear Premier,

Lawyers call for mental health professionals to be first responders, not police

The organisations and individuals that have signed this open letter are disturbed by the recent tragic shootings and use of force by NSW police while conducting welfare checks. We call on the Government to fund trained mental health experts as first responders to mental health crises.

One recent incident resulted in [the tragic death of Krista Kach](#), who was tasered by a NSW police officer after she was peppered with bean bag rounds and a stun gun, when police attended her home to conduct a welfare check.

The NSW police have had four fatal interactions with people in as many months, with Krista's death being the most recent. Almost half of all deaths or serious injuries in NSW police operations are linked to mental health crises.

Responding to mental health crises is a health issue that requires a health focused approach. Mental health professionals should be at the forefront of providing services to people in mental health distress, including those who pose a risk of harm to themselves or others.

We must invest in multidisciplinary responses to critical incidents involving mental health crises as alternatives to the current practice that places police in situations for which they are ill-equipped, thereby risking their own safety as well as the safety of those in crisis. First responders should involve teams trained in crisis intervention, counselling and de-escalation techniques who have the skills and expertise to avoid people in crisis suffering serious injury or death.

[Acting Commissioner of Police David Hudson](#) and the [Police Association of NSW](#) endorse an alternative approach to police having to be the first responders.

We call on the NSW Government to act now, save lives and prevent tragedies by investing in mental health professionals as first responders.

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We also call on the Government to consult with mental health consumer groups and bodies that have expertise in the area of first response alternatives, and to support a Parliamentary Inquiry into the use of force by NSW police.

Yours sincerely

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Professor Justine Nolan, Australian Human Rights Institute, UNSW Sydney
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