Welfare vs Wellbeing in the RFPA Context

Ian Lovell APM

Secretary Retired & Former Police Association of NSW Inc

2nd March 2026

Committee of Management Discussion Paper

Background

The RFPA Committee of Management (CoM) was approached by members, including accredited counsellors, regarding the use of the term **"Welfare"** in our objects and raison d'être.

It was suggested that the term **"Wellbeing"**, now used by some organisations supporting similar member issues, may be more appropriate.

Before forming a view, CoM sought input from:

- other professionals, and

- several interested members,

and undertook its own research.

The Secretary was tasked with preparing a reasoned case **for or against** changing the term. This paper sets out the findings.

Executive Summary

Describing our organisation's work as **welfare**, rather than **wellbeing**, provides a **broader, more accurate, and more culturally aligned** description of what we do for former law enforcement officers and their families.

Welfare captures the full spectrum of support:

- practical,

- emotional,

- social, and

- at times urgent or crisis-based assistance.

By contrast, **wellbeing** is often understood more narrowly as relating to:

- lifestyle,

- health, and

- social connection.

This distinction is especially important for an **ageing policing community**, where needs are often complex and may require hands-on support, advocacy, and intervention.

Why "Welfare" Is the Stronger Descriptor

1. Welfare covers the whole person and their circumstances

Internationally, **welfare** is widely understood as support that promotes people's:

- health,

- happiness, and

- overall circumstances,

often through practical assistance and social support.

It naturally includes:

- help with basic needs,

- navigating systems,

- advocacy, and

- crisis support.

Wellbeing, by contrast, generally focuses on how people **feel and function** (emotionally, physically, and socially), but does not naturally extend to practical intervention or hands-on assistance.

2. Welfare aligns with organisational responsibility, not just individual lifestyle

Globally, **welfare** is associated with organisations and systems **taking responsibility** for supporting people — particularly older or vulnerable groups.

It signals that our association:

- actively assists,

- steps in where needed, and

- accepts a duty of care.

By contrast, **wellbeing** is often framed as an **individual state**, influenced by:

- personal choices,

- habits, and

- social participation.

This can unintentionally imply that the individual is primarily responsible for achieving it.

3. Welfare is more inclusive of ageing-related needs

For older former police, support needs often extend beyond social connection and healthy ageing.

These needs may include:

- navigating aged care or health systems,

- bereavement support,

- financial or housing stress,

- declining mobility,

- social isolation, and

- family support.

Welfare naturally encompasses these issues.

Wellbeing often refers to social activities, mental health, and healthy ageing — all important, but not the complete picture.

4. Welfare better reflects policing culture and mutual care

Police organisations have a longstanding tradition of **looking after their own**.

The term **welfare** resonates strongly with that culture because it reflects:

- practical help,

- solidarity, and

- a shared duty to care for those who served before us.

By comparison, **wellbeing** can sound more:

- corporate,

- programmatic, or

- service-delivery oriented,

rather than relational and mutual.

5. Welfare includes wellbeing — but wellbeing does not include welfare

This is the key structural point.

Welfare is the umbrella term

It includes:

- wellbeing,

- personal assistance,

- advocacy, and

- crisis response.

Wellbeing is a subset

It describes a **desired state**, but not necessarily:

- the support mechanisms,

- the practical assistance, or

- the organisational responsibilities required to help achieve it.

6. Welfare strengthens credibility with partners and government

In policy and service contexts, **welfare** is commonly linked to:

- social support,

- aged care,

- community services,

- vulnerable populations, and

- organisational duty.

This makes it a stronger and more authoritative term when engaging with:

- government,

- police legacy organisations, and

- community partners.

Wellbeing is more commonly used in:

- health promotion,

- psychology, and

- lifestyle or prevention programs,

which are valuable, but narrower in scope.

How the Two Terms Shape General Understanding

Comparison at a Glance

Scope

- **Welfare:** Broad — practical, social, emotional, financial
- **Wellbeing:** Narrower — emotional, physical, social health

Responsibility

- **Welfare:** Organisational duty to support
- **Wellbeing:** Individual state influenced by lifestyle and circumstances

Perception

- **Welfare:** Safety net, care, solidarity
- **Wellbeing:** Happiness, health, life satisfaction

Fit for ageing members

- **Welfare:** Strong — covers complex and changing needs
- **Wellbeing:** Partial — often centred on lifestyle and connection

Cultural alignment with policing

- **Welfare:** High
- **Wellbeing:** Moderate

Implications for the RFPA

Retaining **welfare** as our primary descriptor signals that the RFPA:

- provides **comprehensive support**, not just social connection;
- honours the policing tradition of **mutual care**;
- recognises the **complex needs** of older members and their families;
- offers **practical help** when life becomes difficult; and
- understands **wellbeing as part of welfare**, not a replacement for it.

Conclusion

Using **welfare** as the RFPA's primary descriptor positions the Association as a:

- trusted,

- responsible, and

- culturally aligned support body

for former police and their families.

It reflects the full breadth of our role and avoids narrowing public understanding of our purpose to social or lifestyle programs alone.