



Australian Government

**VVCS – Veterans and Veterans Families
Counselling Service**



Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service
A service founded by Vietnam veterans

newsletter

edition 1 March 2008

Making Stepping Out easier for ADF members and younger veterans

Being a member of the ADF is a unique experience that can be challenging and rewarding at the same time. You may have experienced multiple deployments, long periods away from home, separation from your loved ones, frequent moves to other places in Australia, or watched your mates experience these things. You are part of a community and a social network unlike any other in Australia. For some people stepping out of that environment and returning to civilian life can be difficult and stressful.

Civilian life and military life are two very different experiences in very different environments. The transition between the two can require adjustment.

The changes you experience when separating from the military may impact upon your personal life, your family and your work situation. Understanding the differences between military and civilian lifestyles may help ensure that there is a smooth and positive transition between the two.

The Stepping Out Program has been run on a pilot basis in Townsville, and due to its success, is now available right across Australia.

The two-day Stepping Out Program gives exiting and/or exited ADF members and their partners information about what they can do to manage change in their lives. It helps participants think



about the best way to use the skills they already have. The Program will also teach new skills to:

- Adapt to civilian culture, socially and in the workplace
- Maintain health and manage stress levels
- Maintain a positive attitude when difficulties arise
- Make plans and keep motivated during the transition process
- Deal with changes in family, friendships and other relationships.

While Stepping Out is one of the key elements of our support for younger veterans, peacekeepers and ADF personnel, you may be eligible to access a range of VVCS services. These include counselling, crisis support, information and education around a range of issues including stress management, anxiety, relationships, lifestyle and more.

The Stepping Out Program is available for any member of the ADF who is soon to discharge, or who has recently discharged, and their partner. Call VVCS on 1800 011 046 to reserve a place or to find out more about our services and supports.

from the National Manager



Welcome to the first edition of **VVCS News**—a quarterly national newsletter designed to keep you up to date with programs, news and events across VVCS and DVA.

VVCS is going through a number of changes and it has been an exciting time for us. We are looking at new and innovative ways to provide quality services and supports to the veteran community. From the name change and gifting ceremonies to Outreach Heart Health, Stepping Out and to the new Changing the Mix—Alcohol Correspondence Program we have been busy. We hope that this newsletter will keep you informed about decisions, progress, initiatives and work done by VVCS right across Australia.

The name change recognises the availability of VVCS to younger veterans and current serving ADF members. We also hope that the name change will also encourage more family members to tap into the supports and services we offer.

While this first edition highlights some national VVCS programs future editions will include both a local and a national focus. By combining this local information with national news, we hope that you will become better informed and more comfortable with our services and our centres around Australia.

Whether you are a veteran, a family member of a veteran, or a GP or other service provider, VVCS News will have information for you. VVCS News will try to ensure that the information we publish is informative, accurate and interesting and that the articles respond to the interests and concerns of our readers.

This is a regular column, but I won't always be writing it. The VVCS Directors from your local centres will share this role, so you will only see me write the column every once in a while. We really want you, our readers, to know that we are very much part of the other VVCS centres. Of course, you will certainly recognise your centre staff, but we want you to get to know our larger "family" here in VVCS.

VVCS News is your newsletter. Have your say in the articles and content. What do you want to know? What would you like to read more about? Would you like to share something? We also encourage you to email us questions, queries, ideas...anything at all and we will do our best to incorporate your suggestions.

David Morton
National Manager
VVCS

Start at the beginning—how did we get started, what do we do, who do we do it for?

How did VVCS get started?

Some 59,000 Australians served in the Vietnam War and, following the conflict, many found it difficult to deal with the physical and emotional scars rendered by their service.

However, their shared experience also left Vietnam veterans with a remarkable commitment to each other and a determination to look after each other. This profound sense of mateship led the Vietnam veteran community to lobby for counselling and support services for their fellow veterans and their families.

The Australian Government heeded the call of the Vietnam veterans and in 1982 the Vietnam Veterans Counselling Service opened its first office in Adelaide. Another eight centres were opened across Australia within the next 18 months. Today there are 15 VVCS centres Australia-wide.

VVCS has evolved over the years, expanding the range of services it offers and opening its doors to not only Vietnam veterans and their families, but those involved in more recent conflicts and peace operations.

What do we do?

VVCS – Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service provides counselling and group programs to Australian veterans, peacekeepers, their families



and eligible Australian Defence Force (ADF) personnel. VVCS is a specialised, free and confidential Australia-wide service.

VVCS can provide you and your family with individual, couple and family counselling, crisis counselling and after hours telephone crisis counselling (through Veterans Line), group programs, information and education as well as referrals to other services.

Who is eligible for VVCS services?

- Australian veterans of all conflicts and peace operations
- Partners, and dependent children (under 26 years of age) of veterans with issues arising from the veteran's service and war widows/widowers
- Ex-partners, within five years of separation
- All sons and daughters of Vietnam veterans, regardless of age, with psychological, emotional and social needs arising from the impact of their parent's operational or warlike service.
- Ex-service personnel with a mental health condition as a DVA-accepted disability, and
- Current serving members of the ADF who have been formally referred by the ADF.

If you are unsure if you are eligible or have questions about anything VVCS please contact us on **1800 011 046**.

New-look VVCS National Advisory Committee

Membership of the National Advisory Committee (NAC) of the VVCS – Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service has been expanded. The four new members, each representing the committee’s broader membership, reflect the range of client groups supported by VVCS.

The members of the VVCS National Advisory Committee include:

- Mr Brian McKenzie
Chairman of the NAC and Vietnam veteran
- Dr Tony Williams
Psychiatrist and Vietnam veteran
- Mrs Bronwyn Fullick
Partner of a veteran
- Mr Martin Carr
Peacekeeper and younger veteran
- Mr Tim McCombe*
Vietnam veteran
- Mr John “Blue” Ryan*
Vietnam veteran
- Ms Tracey Negus*
Daughter of Vietnam veteran
- Dr David Monash*
General Practitioner
- Professor Mark Creamer
Director Australian Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health (ACPMH)
- Mr Michael Callan
Ex-officio—Defence Community Organisation (DCO)
- Brigadier Bill Rolfe,
Ex-officio—Repatriation Commissioner
- Mr David Morton
National Manager, VVCS – Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service.

* recently appointed

The National Advisory Committee will also be focusing on creating a strategic work plan that will support VVCS to build and create partnerships within and outside the veteran and defence communities, expand communications and marketing activities, and improve quality assurance measures and community consultation.

What is the NAC?

The NAC is an independent, consultative body that provides advice and support to the Minister for Veterans’ Affairs on the effectiveness and operations of VVCS.

Membership to the NAC is by ministerial appointment. However, we encourage you to contact the NAC to pass on your feedback and ideas to help them represent you as a VVCS client and member of the veteran community.

We would also like to take the opportunity to thank the NAC for all the hard work they do and the invaluable contribution they make to the quality of services that we are able to provide.

Have your say

The NAC meets four times a year at various locations around Australia. Before each meeting the NAC consults with the veteran community to hear from VVCS clients and stakeholders. The next meeting is to be held on

Further information about the NAC and minutes are available on the website—

<http://www.dva.gov.au/health/vvcs/nac/>

To contact the NAC:

VVCS NAC Secretariat
PO Box 21
Woden ACT 2606

Email: vvcsnac@dva.gov.au

Q&A Questions and Answers

The Questions and Answers page will become a regular feature of VVCS News. We want to use this as a forum to answer any questions you have about VVCS, our eligibility, services or questions about you and your family’s health and wellbeing. We encourage you to contact us with your questions—don’t be scared to ask. You never know how many people want the same question answered.

Q1 My partner has just come back from Iraq, and we are fighting a lot. I am concerned about our children and how this will affect them. They are only five and seven years old. My partner has changed a lot since he returned from operational service. Are we eligible for any counselling services from VVCS?

A: Yes, you and your family are eligible for VVCS services at no cost because your husband has had operational service and because your children are dependants. We can provide individual, couple and family counselling. After an assessment session, we can discuss the most appropriate treatment options. Sometimes this will include a recommendation of referral to another agency, particularly when specialised intervention with children is required. If you would like to proceed with this, please phone VVCS and we will be able to arrange an appointment for you. We would need to speak directly to your husband to set up an appointment for him.

Q2 I am really worried about my Dad. He is a Vietnam veteran. He retired recently, and he seems to be getting really down. He is drinking more than he used to, and he shuts himself in his room and doesn’t want to go out. I think there are things he has never talked about and I don’t know how to help him. Can you tell me what I can do?

A: We can provide sessions for you to come in and discuss these concerns and supply information that may assist your dad. Our services are free and confidential—he would not be told that you are attending. We have some good booklets which provide clear information that we can post to you, or give to you when you come in. We also run groups for sons and daughters of Vietnam veterans. Attendees usually find these groups helpful and comment that they didn’t realise their experiences are shared by others.

Q3 I am a Vietnam veteran and two years ago I attended a Heart Health program. My mate’s daughter, Amy, went to Bougainville, and when I was telling her how good Heart Health was, she asked if she could do it too —she said she’d feel better if she were fit. Amy asked me if I could find out if peacekeepers are eligible. Is she eligible to attend and would she get it free too? How does Amy get on the program?

A: Yes, Amy is eligible to attend a Heart Health program, and there is no cost. Recently, eligibility changed to make Heart Health available to all Australian veterans, and this includes peacekeepers. VVCS can post out an application form to you for her to complete. When Amy sends this in we will confirm that the application has been received, and she will be put on a waiting list for the next Heart Health program in the area she has nominated. When we are about to start a Heart Health program in an area, we write to all applicants and they are asked to see their doctor to have a medical consent form completed, and we also ask the applicant to complete a consent form.

If you have a question for our VVCS staff please call us on **1800 011 046** or send us an email to vvcsnews@dva.gov.au

Heart Health Goes Bush

Are you ready for the OHHP workout?

VVCS is pleased to announce that our popular Heart Health Program is now available via correspondence. From now on anyone across Australia will be able to enjoy the benefits of the Heart Health Program!

The Outreach Heart Health Program (OHHP) goes for 12 months and includes two physical activity sessions per week that are tailored to meet your needs, and 15 health educational modules. The OHHP is being run on a trial basis, and has been specially designed for those veterans who live where it is not possible to run the Heart Health Program.

The OHHP offers information and support about a range of different issues. You will learn about setting healthy goals, eating well, lowering your alcohol consumption, communication and stress management, quitting smoking, taking care of your body, solving problems and maintaining a healthy heart.

How does OHHP work?

Each month you will receive a health educational module in the post and two phone calls—one from your Program Coordinator and one from your Health Consultant to help you work through the program. Your health consultant will develop a physical activity program to help you achieve your goals. Throughout the program you will be able to contact your Health Consultant or Program Coordinator at any time through the OHHP toll free number.

You will have all the support you need as you work through the program. You will have your own OHHP support team to help and guide you every step of the way. In your OHHP support team you will have:

- Your GP who will give you health advice and conduct regular mandatory checkups—before, during and after the program to help you stay fit and healthy
- Your Program Coordinator who will provide you with all the resources and materials you need to work through the program
- Your Health Consultant is a trained health professional who is skilled in assisting people plan a health program over the phone.



To help you meet other people in the program you will also be able to log on to the online OHHP forum to share ideas, advice, experiences and to help you keep in touch with your Health Consultant.

Why should I do the OHHP?

Becoming healthy is near the top of most people's lists of 'things to do'.

No matter how it might seem, good health comes down to exercising regularly, eating right, not smoking and getting a balance in your life.

Keeping your mind and body healthy is the most important thing you can do for yourself.

By joining the OHHP, you can look forward to feeling fitter and stronger, sleeping better, feeling better about yourself, keeping up with the kids and grandkids, walking those stairs without getting puffed, and fitting into clothes that are tucked away in the back of your closet from healthier days.

Who is eligible for the OHHP and how can I find out more?

The OHHP is open to all veterans who have not previously completed the Heart Health Program.

The OHHP runs Australia wide, so if it sounds like something that interests you, get in contact with your nearest VVCS centre to enrol or for more information.

Is it time to Change the Mix?

People have always had the occasional drink, but like all good things in life, moderation is the key. Alcohol is part of our culture and our way of life. It is important and helps us to socialise, escape, relax and unwind, but drinking too much may have serious implications for your general quality of life.

Drinking alcohol heavily can seriously damage your health, no matter what age you are. It can not only cause problems physically but can alter your relationships, finances, employment and many other aspects of our lives. If you think you may be an at risk drinker or would like to work on managing your alcohol intake then the VVCS Changing the Mix – Alcohol Correspondence Program is for you.

The program goes for 10 weeks and will give you the skills you need to change your drinking patterns from the comfort and privacy of your own home, anywhere in Australia. There are many benefits to changing the mix. Healthy alcohol consumption can help you lead a happier and healthier lifestyle.

Changing the Mix is based on the effective trial project run by the Department of Veterans' Affairs in 2004. On average, those who finished that program more than halved their weekly consumption of alcohol!

Changing the Mix is open to all Australian veterans and peacekeepers, their partners, adult sons and daughters of Vietnam veterans as well as all members of the Australian Defence Force (ADF) and gold card holders. The other great thing about the

THE RIGHT MIX









program is that it is free to all eligible participants, so you have nothing to lose and a lot to gain.

The best thing about the program is that you can do it from the comfort and privacy of your own home, in your own time but with professional, flexible and personalised support.

The program is delivered via correspondence with modules sent to participants throughout the 10 weeks. Participants complete the modules, monitor their drinking and assess their progress with the support of the Changing the Mix team. The modules cover a range of topics including alcohol intake, decision making, setting goals and more.

To find out more about the Changing the Mix – Alcohol Correspondence Program call **1800 1808 68** and having a chat with the Changing the Mix team about the program and how it can help you modify your drinking habits. You can also find out more about healthy alcohol intake by visiting The Right Mix website—www.therightmix.gov.au

Yes. One drink isn't always one drink.

 1.5 375ml Full Strength Beer 4.9% ALC/VOL	 1.5 425ml Schooner Full Strength beer 4.9% ALC/VOL	 0.5 285ml Middy Low Alcohol beer 2.7% ALC/VOL
 1 30ml Spirit Nip 40% ALC/VOL	 1 100ml Wine Standard Serve 12% ALC/VOL	 1 60ml Port/Sherry 18% ALC/VOL

One standard drink

From the VVCS News team

We hope you enjoyed this first edition of VVCS News.

VVCS News will be sent to VVCS clients, GPs and a range of other health providers, as well as staff who work for DVA (VVCS in particular). We have thought carefully about when you will want program and event information, so we hope that our distribution times meets your information needs.

It will contain information and stories about you, of interest to you (we hope!) and (as often as possible) suggested by you.

We want to make this newsletter interactive and get to the nitty gritty of issues and queries you

may have. We also want to make VVCS News entertaining and informative. We want to stress that we want the content for these columns to be based on what you want to read, so please don't hold back: tell us!

We, at VVCS News can be contacted by phone (02) 6225 4680 or email vvcsnews@dva.gov.au You can also download a copy of our newsletter from our website—www.dva.gov.au/health/vvcs Remember, this is your newsletter—tell us what you want to read in it and we'll do what we can to make it happen. Until next time, keep in touch with us and an eye out for your June edition in the post.

Editorial Committee, VVCS News

To contact VVCS

Call on our toll free number: **1800 011 046**

To contact your nearest VVCS centre during business hours and Veterans Line, after hours.

VVCS Adelaide
99 Frome Street
Adelaide SA 5000

VVCS Albury/Wodonga
81 Hume Street
Wodonga VIC 3690

VVCS Brisbane
15 Astor Terrace
Spring Hill QLD 4000

VVCS Canberra
6–8 Champion Street
Deakin ACT 2600

VVCS Darwin
2 Chung Wah Terrace
Casuarina NT 0810

VVCS Hobart
2 Castray Esplanade
Battery Point TAS 7004

VVCS Launceston
29 Elphin Road
Launceston TAS 7250

VVCS Lismore
Office 6, Level 1,
Conway Court (Entrance:
Molesworth Street)
17 Conway Street
Lismore NSW 2480

VVCS Maroochydore
129 Horton Parade
Maroochydore QLD 4558

VVCS Melbourne
Level 4, 440 Elizabeth Street
Melbourne VIC 3000

VVCS Newcastle
Unit 1/8 Auckland Street
Newcastle NSW 2300

VVCS Perth
7 Kintail Road
Applecross WA 6153

VVCS Southport
12 Short Street
Southport Qld 4215

VVCS Sydney
88 Philip Street, Ground Floor
Parramatta NSW 2150

VVCS Townsville
Nathan Business Centre
340 Ross River Road
Cranbrook QLD 4814