



Kookaburra Kids 'Defence Kids' Program

Why is this important?

Australian and international research shows that children in Defence and veteran families often live with additional challenges to their civilian peers, such as moving regularly with postings and experiencing the absence of a parent away on deployment. The Kookaburra Kids 'Defence Kids' mental health program is designed to meet the unique needs of Australian Defence Force (ADF) and veteran families.

Recent significant events have impacted the Defence and veteran community including the withdrawal from Afghanistan, release of the Inspector-General Australian Defence Force (IGADF) report, COVID-19 restrictions, and the commencement of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide. As such it is a critical time to support Defence and veteran children with tailored services.

Evaluation data captured through the 'Defence Kids' program has shown that participants have experienced positive mental health outcomes through a strengthened sense of social support, increased levels of mental health literacy and improvements in help seeking behaviours. The program provides an avenue to tailored and age-appropriate education, prevention and early intervention mental health services, as well as connecting Defence Kids who are facing similar challenges.

Who will benefit?

The Kookaburra Kids 'Defence Kids' program is available to children from both current and ex-serving ADF families aged 8 – 18 years old. It has a focus on children of ex-serving members who may be more vulnerable following their parent's separation from the ADF and the loss of their Defence community support system.

Date of effect?

1 July 2022

How much will this cost?

\$13.7 million provided over three years from 2022-23 to 2024-25.

More information

This initiative builds on our Government's investment of \$2.1 million for a pilot of the 'Defence Kids' program in 2016, and \$7.7 million to expand the program in 2018. The 'Defence Kids' program has already had more than 4,300 engagements with children in the Defence and veteran community, and this additional funding will expand the program across the regions providing access to even more children.



The funding will see face-to-face services continue in all mainland capital cities as well as the regional centres of Townsville, the Hunter, Wollongong, Shoalhaven and the New South Wales South Coast; however, will also expand the program to more regional areas including Wagga Wagga, Albury/Wodonga, the Mornington Peninsula, Bendigo, Ballarat, Geelong, and for the first time, north and south Tasmania.

Through the 'Defence Kids' program, children can:

- attend overnight camps, where they can build ongoing connections and support networks with peers in similar circumstances
- attend activity days designed to encourage thought leadership, friendship and camaraderie delivered in a recreational setting
- access online Kookaburra Kids Connect platform, providing a safe and supportive environment where kids can express themselves, build resilience, learn how to make positive choices about their emotional wellbeing, and maintain social connections with their 'Defence Kids' peers.