

# GWEN CHERNE

FIRST VETERAN FAMILY ADVOCATE  
COMMISSIONER

ADVOCACY & ACHIEVEMENTS



# INTRODUCTION

Change doesn't happen alone – it's a movement. My advocacy wasn't just about policy; it's driven by real people, real families, and genuine experiences. Together, we've created a lasting legacy that places veteran families at the heart of every decision and conversation. Every story shared, every challenge addressed, and every voice amplified has contributed to the incredible progress we've made. This progress wouldn't be possible without veteran families, ex-service organisations, policy leaders, and everyday Australian's standing together.

Here's how your voices and experiences have shaped some meaningful outcomes.

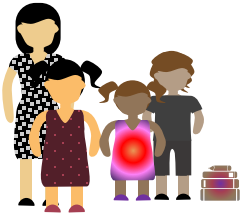


# OUR IMPACT

## ELEVATING THE VISABILITY AND VOICES OF VETERAN FAMILIES

- **Dedicated Advocacy:** Established the Veteran Family Advocate (VFA) as a trusted and integral voice within government processes, ensuring veteran family perspectives are consistently recognised in decision-making.
- **Embedded** the perspectives of veteran families into major reforms.

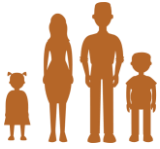
## BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS AND ENHANCING COMMUNITY AWARENESS



- **Comprehensive Engagement:** Since the commencing role as the first Veteran Family Advocate Commissioner in August 2020, I have liaised with more than 50,000 individuals and organisations, attending approximately 5,000 meetings and responding to extensive correspondence. Continuously engaging with veteran families, embedding their perspectives into DVA's decision-making processes.
- **Community Engagements:** Traveled to Darwin, Melbourne, Adelaide, and Canberra in the first quarter of 2023 to engage veterans, families, target groups and ESO's to get initial feedback on themes to be included in the Defence and Veteran Family Wellbeing Strategy and National Action Plan that sits under the Strategy.
- **Strengthened Relationships:** with Canada, US, and domestic sector partners on Mild Traumatic Brain Injury (MTBI), postvention and families.
- Provides regular advice to ESOs on how to better support and include families in their service provisions.
- Meet regularly with the Prime Minister's Advisor for Suicide Prevention to ensure that veterans and families issues are considered and included in whole of government programs and services now and in the future.
- Engaged regularly with the Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence Commissioner to raise awareness of the unique experiences and barriers faced by veteran families, so civilian services are better equipped to respond to veteran families. These meetings provided opportunities to share information collaborate and cultivate a productive working relationship with mutual benefits.
- Engaged bi-monthly with the NSW Veteran Affairs Director to share information, collaborate, and cultivate a productive working relationship for mutual benefits.
- Engaged regularly with the NSW Women's Safety Commissioner to raise awareness of the unique experiences and barriers faced by veteran families, so civilian services are better equipped to respond to veteran families. Share collaboration and cultivate a productive working relationship with mutual benefits.







- Attended meetings with the State and Territory Office of Veteran Affairs to update, share, collaborate and cultivate a productive working relationship with mutual benefits.
- **Expanding Reach and Engagement:** Since assuming my role, I have continued to travel across the country, engaging with veterans, their families, and Ex-Service Organisations (ESOs). These extensive visits are not just about being present but about actively listening and gathering invaluable feedback. By understanding the real experiences and needs of veteran families firsthand, I can advocate more effectively for better systems and support. This direct engagement ensures their voices are powerfully represented in policy discussions, driving meaningful change for our veteran community.



## TRANSFORMATIVE ADVOCACY

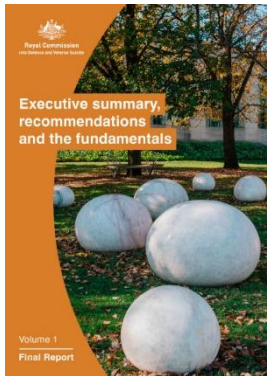
- **Resourcing:** Successfully advocated for the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) to expand its Family Policy Team from 1.5 FTE to a dedicated team of eight, who focus solely on developing and improving policies, support, and services for veteran families.

## ROYAL COMMISSION INTO DEFENCE AND VETERAN SUICIDE

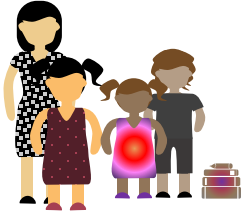
- Conduct roundtables with widows and parents bereaved by suicide to provide feedback to the Terms of Reference for the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide (RCDVS).
- Appearance at Royal Commission in February 2022. Shared personal insights and reflections and 16 recommendations with the Royal Commission.
  - Recommendations were provided to the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) for consideration and implementation.
  - Recommendations were provided and regularly advocated for Defence to consider and implement.
- August 2023 gave evidence to the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide in the capacity as the Veteran Family Advocate Commissioner. Provided views on the challenges in the role and improvements to increase the visibility and recognition of Veteran Families.
- Member of the Royal Commission Stakeholder Reference Group and provided insights and advice to the RCDVS.
- Furthered recommendations for the Department in response to the Royal Commission

## REPATRIATION COMMISSION AND MILITARY REHABILITATION & COMPENSATION COMMISSION (RC/MRCC)

- **Claims Backlog:** Advised on the Department's approach to the claims backlog and exceptionally old cases.
- **Special Assistance Instrument:** February 2022 the Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Commission (MRCC) approved a Special Assistance Instrument ensuring children between 16 and 25 experiencing a diagnosed mental health condition will no longer lose access to the gold card if they cannot attend school full-time. This Special Assistance Instrument enables assistance to be made to support for dependents of



members, former members and deceased members who would otherwise miss out on compensation or benefits due to mental illness or injury.



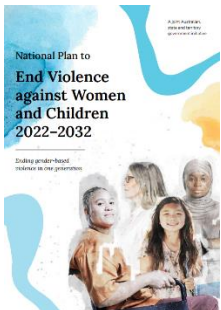
- **Acute Support Package:** Played a pivotal role in the Defence, Veterans' and Families' Acute Support Package, which commenced on 14 October 2022. The Package is designed to help families adjust and equip them to manage independently into the future. It provides practical support to vulnerable working age veteran families at risk, on in, crisis due to new and challenging life circumstances.
  - Expansion of the Defence, Veterans' and Families' Acute Support Package in the Budget on 9 May 2023, eligibility was extended to grandparents who are the fulltime carers of the children of a veteran.
    - Directly addressed concerns about the administration of the ASP by advocating for clearer information, developing communications products, and planning workshops with stakeholders.
- **Family Impact Statement:** Successfully advocated for a mandatory family impact statement in all Repatriation Commission and MRCC submissions, ensuring family considerations are integral to policy development. This ensures that policies are developed with a comprehensive understanding of their impact on families.
- **Input into AI and Digital Decision-Making:** Provided early-stage advice to the RC and MRCC on the development of digital and AI-driven decision-making tools in compensation systems. Advocated for ethical design that safeguards vulnerable groups, including families.
- **Service Delivery Improvements During and After the Pandemic:** Provided advice to the MRCC on emergency and long-term service delivery reforms during the COVID-19 pandemic. This included telehealth, community nursing flexibility, and improvements in correspondence. Ensuring a balance of remote and face-to-face support for vulnerable veterans and carers.
- **Improved Gold Card Entitlements for Families:** Supported and progressed systemic improvements through MRCC that extended Gold Card eligibility to young people with mental health conditions and provided a pathway to earlier access for carers.
- **Expanding Access to Presumptive Conditions:** Contributed to the development of legislative reforms allowing certain conditions to be accepted on a presumptive basis under the MRCA, without relying on the Statement of Principles. This change removes the evidentiary burden for many veterans, making claims faster and more accessible. The expanded approach ensures that known service-related conditions, such as those affecting ADF firefighters, F-111 Deseal/Reseal workers, and others under existing policy, are covered with greater flexibility, aligning support with lived experience and service realities.
- **Modernised Nursing and Home Care Services:** Approved major upgrades to the Community Nursing and Veterans' Home Care programs, cut red tape, opened roles to supervised student nurses, and extended remote delivery options. These changes mean faster access, smarter staffing, and more flexible support for families.
- **Easier Access to Transport for Vulnerable Veterans:** Streamlined the Booked Car with Driver program by removing outdated restrictions, making it easier for vulnerable clients to get to treatment.
- **Fairer Debt Decisions:** Approved VEA debt waivers and endorsed update overpayment policies to reduce unnecessary hardships for veterans and families.





- **Psychiatric Assistance Dog Program Treatment Principles Update:** Endorsed the updated Treatment Principles, ensuring clarity and consistency in extended mental health support for veterans.
- **Streamlining Access to Medicines through RPBS Reform:** Amended the Repatriation Pharmaceutical Benefits Schedule (RPBS) listing process to ensure more timely and simplified access to medications, including adjustments or new pharmaceuticals and treatment pathways.
- **Indexation of Education Scheme Support:** Approved amendments to the Veterans' Children Education Scheme (VCES) to increase the annual rates of additional tuition and special assistance in line with the Consumer Price Index (CPI), with automatic yearly indexation.
- **Care and Support Services:** Provided strategic advice on options for regulating care and support services within DVA, aiming to embed safety, quality, and contemporary standards. Sought direction from the Commission to explore a preferred long-term approach.
- **Updated Diagnostic Criteria for Mental Health Claims:** Provide advice to refine and modernise how mental health conditions are diagnosed and assessed within liability claims, improving claim outcomes and aligning assessments with current clinical understanding.
- **Clinical Guidance on Gendered Impact of Service:** Offered policy advice on how service impacts differ between male and female veterans, encouraging tailored approaches in care, claims and program design.

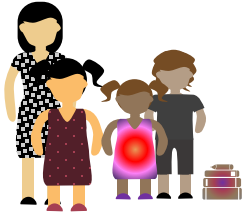
## STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP IN FAMILY, DOMESTIC AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE



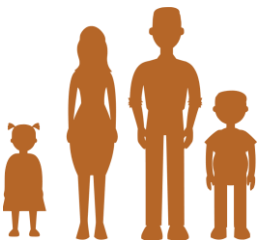
- **National Recognition:** Successfully advocated for military and veteran families to be explicitly included for the first time ever in the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children (2022-2032).
  - Successfully advocated and requested veteran families with lived experience and organisations to lodge additional submissions during the consultation process.
- **National Women's Safety Summit (2021):** Participated and represented the experiences, challenges and barriers faced by veteran families. Military and veteran families are listed as a priority cohort in the Stakeholder Consultation Report that came out of the Summit.
  - Following the Summit, delivered recommendations to DVA and Defence. These have been adopted by DVA into their list of activities to implement as part of the Family and Domestic Violence Strategy.
- **Domestic Violence Strategy Implementation:** Overseen the implementation and provided strategic guidance of DVA's inaugural Family and Domestic Violence Strategy 2020-25 as a member of the Strategy Implementation Group. This strategy outlines DVA's approach over the next five years to improving the support for those affected by family and domestic violence.
- **STOP DV Conference (2022):** Presented at the STOP DV conference in December 2022 on experience of veteran families, to help mainstream services understand how to assist veteran families seeking help.
- **Community of Practice:** Sponsored and participated in cross-community Domestic and Intimate Partner Violence Community of Practice, working towards a coordinated whole community approach. This group has been successful in pushing and providing



recommendations for the Family and Domestic Violence (FDV) issues across Defence and DVA as well as the broader sector.



- **Cross-sector Collaboration:** Actively worked with the FDV sector to work on understanding the unique nature of military service of veteran families when it comes to additional barriers to care and support.
  - Worked with 1800 Respect to provide specialised training to service providers to enhance understanding on the unique nature of military and veteran families.
- Regularly released communication material to raise awareness in the veteran family community about family, domestic and intimate partner violence, including where to seek help.
- Successfully advocated and recommended, DVA engage with Department of Social Services (DSS) and the Australian National Research Organisation to seek a military/veteran in their whole of Australia survey of community attitudes about violence.
- Advocated for the Personal Safety Survey (PSS) by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (last held 2016) would contain ADF service status question. (Delayed)
- **Monitoring Trends in DFV:** I strongly endorsed, supported, and actively participated in the groundbreaking \$2 million ANROWS and DVA-funded project led by Monash University. This initiative aims to significantly improve data collection and develop robust strategies to reduce family and domestic violence within military veteran families.
  - Contributed to Project Steering Group for the ANROWS-DVA applied research project on FDV in military and veteran families. Contributing to data source mapping, method design, interpretation of findings and knowledge translation so reforms are evidence-led and fit real-world service settings.
- **Webinar Presentations:** On May 16, 2024, I presented at the Hills Community Aid Domestic Violence Awareness Event to support those affected by domestic violence.
- On May 20, 2024, I had the privilege of joining Dr. Sean Cowlshaw for a powerful webinar with the Families of Veterans Guild during Domestic Violence Prevention Month. Dr. Cowlshaw broke down the complexities of intimate partner violence and family domestic violence within Defence and DVA contexts, clarifying key definitions and assumptions. I shared lived experiences and eye-opening statistics, highlighting the impact of intimate partner violence.
- **Men and Boys Initiative:** Attended and contributed to presentations and workshops, guiding sector partners and agencies to ensure the veteran family lens is embedded in program design for men and boys initiatives.
- **National Leaders Unite at Government House:** Took part in Government House meeting of Commissioners and Ambassadors to present a united stand against gender-based violence and ensuring veterans families were included in the response.
- **Domestic Violence Initiative Launch with Commissioner Cronin:** Supported Commissioner Cronin to launch a domestic violence initiative that connects veteran families to the right services.



## ENHANCING FAMILY AND PARTNER EMPLOYMENT INITIATIVES

- **Family/Partner Employment Initiatives:** Directly advocated to organisations such as DVA, Defence, States and Territories, Defence Industry, organisations such as Princes Trust,



Solder On, Australian Catholic University to co-design and create programs with families at the centre of their employment initiatives not as add-ons to existing programs.

- Regularly advocated for universities, businesses, and other employment programs to create and co-design programs. Some growth has occurred in this space, and programs have been developed.
- **Prime Minister's Employment Awards:** Successfully advocated for introducing two new categories: 'Partner Employee' and 'Partner Entrepreneur of the Year', recognising the vital contributions of ADF partners. These awards help highlight the valuable role that partners play in the workforce.
- **Employment Pilot:** Supported and promoted employment pilots and pathways for Defence partners and veteran families, particularly in Townsville, facilitating meaningful employment opportunities. These initiatives help address the employment challenges often faced by veteran families.
- **Research Study:** Advocated for DVA to undertake a review of Veteran Partner Employment. The aim to understand the impacts of military service and the veteran family experience on the employment experience of partners, and the efficacy of current programs that seek to positively address these impacts.

## ENHANCED EDUCATION SUPPORT



- **Enhanced Education Support:** Established streamlined, holistic, and strategic oversight of the Education Schemes in line with today's families and their needs.
  - Created a nationally consistent approach, improving governance, timeliness, and effectiveness of support to families accessing the Schemes. Families can access financial assistance, student support services, tuition, guidance, and counselling for eligible children to achieve their full potential in full-time education or career training.
- Provide government and DVA feedback and advice on legislative gaps where reform should be considered and prioritised, i.e., extending the definition of dependent children, support, and medical care for carers of veterans, DRCA children to be eligible for the Education Scheme.
- **School Supports:** Successfully advocated along with others for States and Territories to include a 'Defence and Veteran Family' identifier on school enrolment forms.
  - The inclusion of a tick box that identifies both children of current and former serving families is a key to levelling the playing field for children who can be disadvantaged because of their parent's service and the transient lifestyle they are often required to live. Veteran families often have unique challenges – especially through their period of transition out of military life and in the years following. The most successful veteran families are well supported and connected in their communities. In order to support all Defence and veteran families better, we must first know who they are.
- **School Zoning:** Actively advocated to improve restrictive school zoning regulations that significantly impact Defence and Veteran families.
  - These families often relocate and face substantial barriers in securing consistent education for their children. We are pushing for priority enrolment status and the implementation of flexible zoning policies to ensure that Defence and Veteran families can access quality education with minimal disruption. Our efforts aim to enhance the well-being of these families and improve the overall performance and readiness of service members.





## RECOGNITION



- **Special Families Last Post:** Successfully organised the inaugural 'Special Last Post and A Time of Reflection' on 24 April 2023 which focused on families.
- Advocated and engaged with the Australian War Memorial Council to consider making the 'Last Post and A Time of Reflection Service' an annual event to honour the sacrifices and services of all those connected to the defence community, across all wars, conflicts, and peacekeeping operations.
- Advocated for the Australian War Memorial to establish the Sufferings of War and Service Committed. The Sufferings of War and Service sculpture, For Every Drop Shed in Anguish that was unveiled 22 February 2024.
- **Roll of Honour:** Advocated and engaged with the Australian War Memorial (AWM), Memorial Director, and Council to review and amend the current criteria and eligibility for the Roll of Honour to reflect the contemporary research around service-related deaths. To commemorate those who have lost their life as a result of service.
- **National War Widows Day:** Advocated, along with others to the Australian Government to create a National War Widows Day – 19 October.
  - We have more than 40,000 war widows and widowers in Australia and most states and territories are now recognising them for their contributions.
- **Australian Veterans' Brain Bank:** Provided early support that helped establish momentum and public visibility for the Brain Bank, including providing a number of suggestions for ambassadors to strengthen outreach and participation.

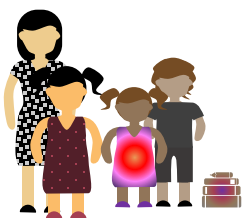
## PROGRAMS AND SERVICES



- Built family consideration into the bureaucratic processes and ensured families are embedded into existing policies.
- **Extended Support through Ex-Service Organisations (ESOs):** Advocated for Ex-Service Organisations (ESO's) to include parents in their services and support – specifically bereaved parents, i.e. Robe 2 Recovery, Families of Veterans Guild (formerly Australian War Widows (AWW) NSW).
- Initiated pilot for peer support workers from Open Arms to be embedded in Ex-Service Organisations (ESO's) working directly with those significantly affected by the Inspector-General of the Australian Defence Force (IGADF) Afghanistan Report and the Office of the Special Investigator.
- Successfully advocated for DVA staff to build trauma informed practice into the writing of correspondence for veterans and families. This resulted in staff completing a "Writing with Empathy" training course (which they undertook in the first half of 2023).

## LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY INFLUENCE

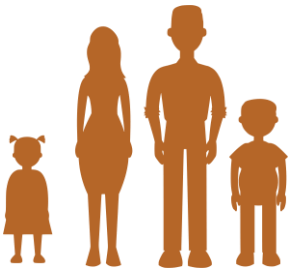
- **Legislative Reform:** Provided feedback and advice to the government's legislative reform initiative to ensure families, widows and children are considered in the legislative reform recommendations that will be put to government in line with the date the Royal Commission identified.
- **Legislative Harmonisation:** Provided advice to align overlapping veteran support statutes and instruments, reducing ambiguity for families and improving consistency in access, eligibility, and decision-making across schemes.
- **Policy Influence:** Played a part in advocating for DVA to have a 'Prison Support Officer' role. The role will work closely with state based correctional services facilities to ensure





incarcerated veterans and their families are supported both at the time they enter and are released. The Prison Support Officer works directly with the facility. (States rollout is being phased and under individually in line with authority and approvals required).

- **Veteran Family Policy Forums:** Participated and contributed targeted advice and lived-experience insights that shaped forum agendas and fed into tangible policy changes for family supports, education schemes and pathways to care.
- **Women Veterans Policy Forum:** Provided targeted advice and lived-experience insights on the gendered impacts of service, informing policy settings, service design, and clearer pathways to care for women veterans.
- **Young Veteran's Forum:** Provided lived experience insights and specialist advice through forum participation, presenting updates on what is being heard from the community and contributing to emerging issues for veterans and families, helping shape the agenda for operational policy improvements, social health supports and engagement pathways for younger veterans.
- **Deputy Commissioner Consultative Forums:** Engaged directly with ex-service organisations across multiple states to share insights from veteran and family community, highlighting emerging themes, and support collaboration on practical solutions. Presented updates on what families are experiencing on the ground and contributed to strengthening partnerships that drive more coordinated, responsive services for veterans and families.
- **AIHW Veterans Advisory Group:** Advised on indicators, definitions, and ethical use of data to improve how veteran and family outcomes are measured and reported across health, wellbeing, and service access.
- **Including Families in the Legislation:** Incorporating families into legislation requires a clear, modern definition of who qualifies as a veteran's family. While 'Wholly Dependent Partner' has been used for War Widows under the MRCA, we recommend 'Bereaved Family Member' for its clarity and inclusivity. Community discussions revealed that referring to a partner as wholly or partly dependent is outdated and offensive. Feedback strongly favours 'bereaved family' as future terminology, even though the older generation of veteran families still strongly prefers 'widow(er).' Embracing 'Bereaved Family Member' aligns with modern family dynamics and diverse compositions, making it more acceptable to younger partners and ensuring our language is both gender-neutral and relevant.
- **Removing Privacy Barriers:** Empowering families to be more involved in supporting veterans is critical to the health and well-being of veterans and families. We propose streamlining and simplifying the authority-to-act processes, making it easier for families to step in, especially when veterans are in crisis. This change will ensure families can provide timely and effective support without unnecessary bureaucratic hurdles.
- **Fair Funeral Entitlements:** Ensuring all bereaved families get fair support is essential. The inequities in funeral entitlements arise from several provisions in the amendments. The varying eligibility criteria, pension status differences, capped amounts, and administrative hurdles create unequal support for families of deceased members, resulting in financial and procedural challenges.
- **Care for Children:** Providing long-term mental health and well-being support for children of veterans is crucial. Children of veterans may require mental health and well-being support throughout their lifetime due to the impacts of service or their parents' mental health challenges. Support provisions should be reviewed, assessed, and adequately supported.





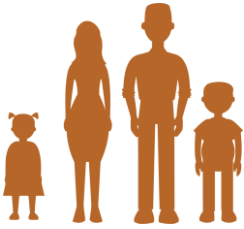
- **Flexible and Adequate Domestic Assistance:** Providing practical support to help veteran families live independently and remain in their homes longer while ensuring benefits keep up with rising living costs. This assistance helps families maintain their independence and quality of life.
- **Family Engagement in Transition Support:** Including families in transition support provisions is vital to enhancing their role in the veteran's journey. This ensures that families are supported during the transition to civilian life.
- **Reflecting Community Expectations:** It is essential to use modern language and meet current community expectations for diversity and inclusion in care and support provisions. By adopting language that reflects diverse family structures and compositions, we can ensure our support systems are inclusive and relevant to all families. This approach respects the evolving dynamics of today's families and fosters a more welcoming and supportive environment for everyone.
- **Extended Coverage for Service-Related Diseases:** Including deaths due to service-related diseases treated during service is crucial. This ensures that families receive support when a veteran's death is linked to their service.
- **Recognition and Support for Carers:** Carers play a vital role in supporting veterans and deserve recognition and enhanced provisions. Veterans can face health issues that require long-term care, and current mainstream services do not adequately address the unique challenges faced by veteran carers. Carers often end up with their own health issues unattended due to their caregiving responsibilities. By improving provisions for these dedicated individuals, we can ensure they receive the support they need and deserve while continuing to care for our veterans. Currently, many of these carers receive the Gold Card after their veteran has died. Providing medical care for carers who cannot work due to caregiving responsibilities of veterans who are Gold Card holders throughout the veteran's lifetime, instead of only once the veteran has died, would be sensible and beneficial.
- **Extension of the ADF Family Health Scheme:** We propose extending the ADF Family Health Scheme to include the families of veterans who are Gold Card holders. Currently, there are significant gaps in the service, leaving these families without essential benefits like stable employment, housing, and healthcare. Families, particularly those with special needs children and spouses, face challenges that are not adequately addressed under the current and mainstream systems. By expanding the scheme to veteran families, we can ensure these families receive the comprehensive support they need and deserve, helping them maintain their well-being and stability.



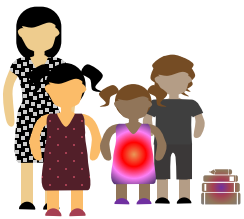
## CONSULTATION AND CO-DESIGN INITIATIVES



- **Family Strategy and Action Plan:** Initiated the creation of the inaugural Family Strategy to recognise and support the contributions of veterans' families, setting a clear direction for comprehensive support. As part of this effort, we successfully advocated for and contributed to the development of an Action Plan under the Defence and Veteran Family Wellbeing Strategy. Additionally, strongly pushed for an Outcomes framework to be integrated into the plan. This framework will ensure that every action is purposeful, measurable, and impactful, providing a clear roadmap for enhancing the well-being of veteran families and ensuring their needs are met through concrete actions.



- **Corporate Recognition:** Successfully advocated for Veteran Families' explicit recognition in DVA's 2023-24 Corporate Plan, acknowledging them as distinct clients.
- **Security and Safety Advocacy:** Successfully advocated for the ongoing inclusion of 'Security and Safety' within the DVA Wellbeing Framework, reinforcing these crucial elements in veteran support strategies. This ensures that the safety and security of veteran families remain a top priority in policy decisions ([2023-24 Corporate Plan](#)).
- **Cross-Functional Working Group Establishment:** Founded a DVA working group encompassing policy, service delivery, and commemorations to unify efforts in supporting veteran families, demonstrating a collaborative and inclusive approach to family support and service provision.
- **Family-Centric Engagement:** Led initiatives to embed the consideration of veteran families' perspectives within DVA, from staff engagement sessions to advising senior leadership. This fostered a culture of inclusivity and awareness, ensuring that veteran families' needs are at the forefront of decision-making processes.
- Led engagement sessions with staff across DVA to encourage them to think about veteran families in their day-to-day work. Gathered information from them about family experiences and service gaps.
- **Policy Influence and Recommendations:** Identified service gaps for vulnerable groups within the veteran community, including children, carers, parents, bereaved families and domestic violence perpetrators and survivors. Through targeted policy recommendations and input into new proposals, geared towards closing these gaps and enhancing support for those most in need.
- Provided input into consultation and working groups of the Joint Transition Authority to ensure engagement with families in transition from Defence.
- **Leadership:** Encouraged Commissioners and Senior DVA staff to consider the perspectives of veteran families in their discussions at key governance committees including Executive Management Board, Executive Leadership group, the Repatriation Commission (RC) and the Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Commission (MRCC).



## SUICIDE PREVENTION AND POSTVENTION

- **Influential Presentations:** Co-presented at the International Association for Suicide Prevention with Christine Morgan, the Prime Ministers Advisor for Suicide Prevention on the importance of including lived experience in policy and program development and implementation.
- Presented at the Interim National Commissioner for Defence and Veteran Suicide Prevention Symposium on lived experience and insights into suicide and support needed for veterans and families.
- **Support for Bereaved Families:** Advocated for tailored, support groups and co-designed and co-implemented programs and psychoeducation for bereaved families, especially postvention programs for those bereaved by suicide.
- **National Suicide Prevention Strategy (2025-2035):** As a member of the National Suicide Prevention Office (NSPO), I continue to provide expert insights on the needs and concerns specific to veterans and veteran families. I advocate for integration of lived-experience perspectives into policy and program design to ensure that support reflects the realities of those most affected.
  - Continue to contribute to the qualitative co-production that will shape the development of the National Suicide Prevention Outcomes Framework, helping



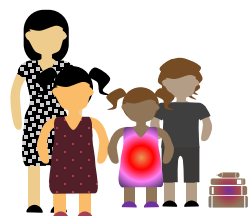


define how Australia will measure real progress in suicide prevention, especially for those navigating service, trauma, and loss including within the veteran community.



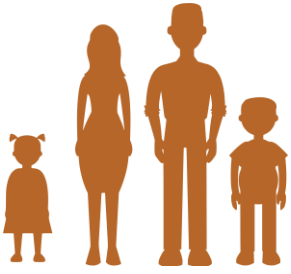
- Advocated for the continuation of Training in Suicide Recognition and Intervention to support the continued delivery of mental health literacy and suicide intervention training for the ex-service community.
- **Postvention Programs for Suicide Bereavement:** Led the development and delivery of Australia's first TAPS Postvention Workshop, a trauma-informed, peer-led pilot supporting 30 bereaved Defence and veteran families. Delivered in Sydney from 24–28 July 2025, the program brought the leading U.S. provider, TAPS, to Australia for the first time. The workshop included pre- and post-engagement, grief support, peer connection, and remembrance activities. It directly supports Royal Commission recommendations and sets the foundation for a national veteran family postvention strategy.
- **Defence and Veteran Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy:** Provided advice into the development of the Defence and Veteran Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy as a member of the Steering Group.
- **Advocated to Government:** Advocated to government and provided advice and worked directly with Military and Emergency Services Health Australia (MESHA) and a number of organisations and lived experience leaders in our community on a bereavement after Suicide National (Postvention) Framework and support for families bereaved by suicide.

## IMPROVING RESEARCH AND DATA



- **Research Integration:** Actively participated in the Advisory Committee for the Australian Military and Veterans' Family Study, jointly commissioned by Defence and DVA.
- **Enhanced Data Advocacy:** Worked with DVA, state, and territory agencies to ensure census and research data reflect the lived realities of veteran families, enhancing policy relevance and effectiveness.
- **Data-Driven Advocacy:** Advocated for improved identification of Defence and veteran families in national data collection initiatives, ensuring targeted, informed policies and services.
- Provided advice to the Advisory Committee for the Australian Military and Veteran's Family Study - Australian Institute of Family Studies - jointly commissioned by Defence and DVA.
- Advocated for the support of the research from the 'Understanding Encounters with Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) among Australian Veterans and Families – Phoenix Australia – partially funded by DVA.
- Working with the Commonwealth States and Territories Veterans Affairs Offices and DVA to make sure that the census and Person Level Integrated Data Asset (PLIDA) data (previously known as Multi Agency Data and Insights Program (MADIP)) is used to better understand the lives of veteran families.
- Consulted with the community to construct a list of 200 questions relating to veteran family demographics, employment, education levels, etc. to be answered by DVA through the census data and the PLIDA data.
- Contributed to HILDA Survey for Veteran Families: worked to ensure veteran families were represented in national data through the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey, providing evidence to support policy advice.





- Member of an International Services Family Research Consortia to ensure we know what research is currently happening overseas and in Australia for veteran families.
- Steering Role on Cross-Sector FDV Data Project: Provide steering oversight on a cross-sector FDV data project, shaping a mixed-methods approach and building simple, durable processes to track trends.



## LOOKING AHEAD

As the Veteran Family Advocate Commissioner journey continues with your experiences, your resilience, and voices remain our greatest strength. Every step forward reinforces why this role matters: because behind every policy decision is a family whose life can change for the better. Your stories fuel our determination to ensure every veteran family is supported, empowered, and valued – not just today, but well into the future.

Thank you for being part of this vital journey.

