

VETERAN FAMILY COMMISSIONER

# Strategic Plan 2025 - 2030

*Our clear roadmap to ensure Veteran families are recognised, included and supported in their own right, with practical actions that reflect their realities and the challenges they face.*



Photo courtesy of Richard Weisel

# A Message from the Commissioner

Families of veterans carry the weight of service long after the uniform comes off. They deserve systems that are built on lived experience and show up when needed most.

I see my role as a bridge. I connect the veteran family experience to government. It's my job to hear your voice and translate it into lasting systemic change. My vision is not simply to improve services at the edges, but to reimagine how equity, clarity, partnership and belonging can be embedded at the heart of our system.

It needs to be done with respect, with compassion, and with the practicality that makes life easier, not harder.

This plan sets out an ambitious roadmap: Recognising families as individuals in their own right, ensuring services are clear and trauma-informed, empowering ESOs to partner more effectively and building the life foundations that give families a true sense of belonging. These are big goals, but families of veterans deserve nothing less.



The Veteran Family Commissioner serves as the bridge between lived experience and government policy. The Commissioner exists to remove barriers, influence systemic change, and improve the lives of families of veterans. The role is positioned uniquely within DVA and government, and brings trusted insight, evidence, and a “skin-in-the-game” commitment to ensuring families are seen, heard, and supported.

## The Veteran Family Commissioner:

- Champions equity and accessibility for all families impacted by service
- Identifies systemic issues raised by the community and advocates for reform
- Pushes for the removal of barriers and roadblocks to lasting change
- Escalates individual cases within the department where further attention is needed
- Provides evidence-based policy advice informed by lived experience
- Builds strong partnerships through stakeholder engagement and collaboration

### Mission:

***Remove barriers, amplify lived experience, and create equity so all families of veterans thrive.***

### Vision:

***A system that shows up for families of veterans, and empowers them to build safe and fulfilling futures.***

## Values:



### Integrity

*Act with honesty and independence in every decision.*



### Courage

*Speak hard truths, challenge barriers, and pursue bold reform.*



### Equity

*Champion fairness so that every family has access to what they deserve.*



### Clarity

*Use plain language, and cut through complexity with insight.*



### Collaboration

*Build bridges across sectors and communities to create lasting change.*

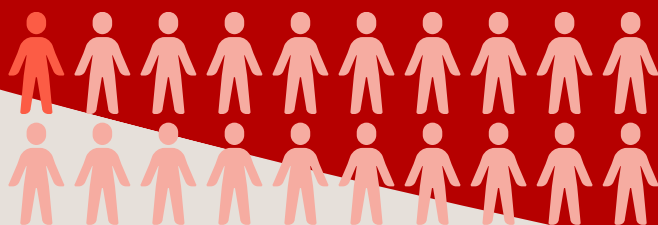
## A family of a veteran includes:

- Children
  - Partners
  - Parents
  - Grandparents
  - Siblings
  - Blended and step-families
  - Carers
  - Kin carers
  - Extended family members
  - Former spouses and ex-partners
  - Widows
  - Peer support groups
  - Groups representing families of veterans
  - Community organisations who come across a child of a veteran
- 

## Families of veterans:

- Want to see themselves recognised and represented
- Are chosen, varied, and even include pets
- Have been impacted by service
- Want to feel heard and respected
- Seek simplified systems and clear communication
- Want to see evaluation of services and evidence-based practices
- Want to be a part of the solution

## What the Statistics Tell Us



In the 2021 Census, 1 in 20 Australian households (5.3%) reported at least one person who had served or was currently serving in the ADF

## In those households...

**Children of military families** were more likely to be temporarily absent (e.g., with other parent / travelling / boarding) on Census night

**Step- and blended families** were more common in ex-serving members than in current-serving members and civilians

**1 in 4**

adult children (of current-serving members) reported high psychological distress

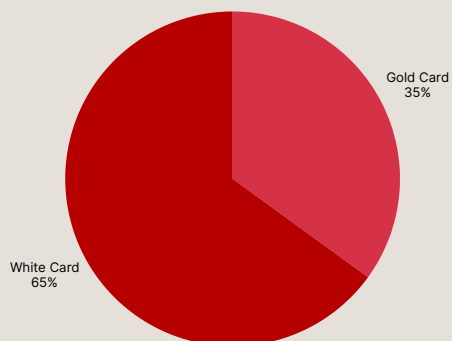
**40%**

of civilian spouses/parents feel that military service had negative effects on their mental health

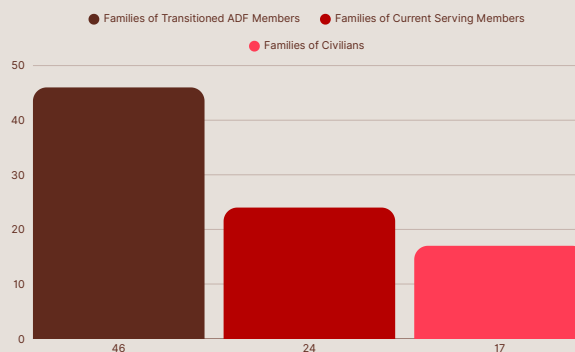
**~83,800**

eligible dependents received income support from DVA in 2020–21

## Gold card vs White card holders



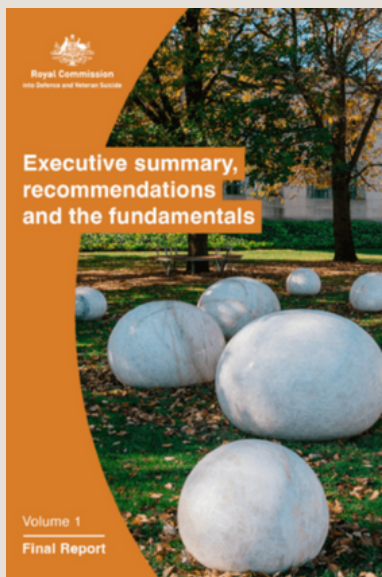
## Percentage of intimate partner violence exposure



# Operating Context

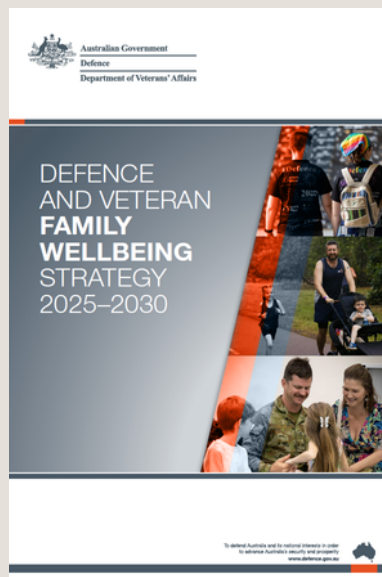
Key factors influencing our strategy:

- Outcomes of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide
- Joint Defence and DVA Strategies including the Joint Transition Strategy and the Joint Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy
- New VETS Act and legislative reforms
- Changing demographic and social needs of veterans and families of veterans
- Increased expectations for transparency and accountability
- Evolving ESO landscape and community partnerships



## Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide

This final report is the culmination of three years of inquiry into the suicide crisis in Australia's Defence and veteran population. The report includes 122 recommendations to Government, which form the Royal Commission's blueprint for real, meaningful and long-lasting reform.



## Defence and Veteran Families Wellbeing Strategy

The Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) and Defence have worked together to develop this Strategy and Action Plan. These documents are informed by the experiences and feedback of families of veterans and Defence personnel, and those who represent and advocate for them.



## Department of Veterans' Affairs Corporate Plan

This plan sets out the Department's objectives. It is a roadmap for improving the services and support that DVA provides to veterans and families of veterans and sets performance measures to benchmark success.

## The Challenge

- **A complex and fragmented service system** that is difficult to navigate
- **Limited understanding of available supports**, including when services change or when to reapply
- **Vicarious and intergenerational trauma** and the wellness and wellbeing of children of veterans
- **Inconsistent recognition** of diverse family structures
- **Inequities in access and eligibility** across programs and services
- **Feeling invisible** and “disappearing” after discharge
- **Difficulties during the transition from service to civilian life**, including limited insight into the specific experiences of families
- **Challenges for regional and remote communities** in accessing timely support
- **Evolving needs** following Royal Commission recommendations
- **A demand for stronger accountability and transparency** across the veteran support system



**Focus Area 1**  
**Equity of Eligibility**  
**and Access**

**Strategic Plan**  
**2025 – 2030**

**Focus Area 3**  
**Enhancement of ESO**  
**Partnerships and**  
**Supports**





## **Focus Area 2**

# **Clarity and Improvement of DVA Services and Supports for Families**

*My vision is a system that shows up for families of veterans, and empowers them to build safe and fulfilling futures.*

## **Focus Area 4**

# **Build Life Foundations and Cultivate Belonging**

# Focus Area #1

## Equity of Eligibility and Access

### Success looks like

*Families of veterans are recognised as individuals, not just extensions of their veteran, with legislation and policy reflecting modern structures like kin-carers, ex-partners and blended families. The claims process is streamlined and trauma informed. Defence and veteran children have access to evidence-based supports. Carers and ageing partners are respected through healthcare and continuity after loss. True equity means families of veterans are safe, supported, and have the tools to thrive at every stage.*

### How it's achieved

- Better understand and support our Defence and Veteran Children
- Support the Carers
- Ensure an expanded application of presumptive liability, reflective of community need

### Royal Commission Recommendations targeted



### Defence and veteran families wellbeing strategy actions targeted



# Focus Area #2

## Clarity and improvement of DVA Services and Supports for Families

### How it's achieved

- Address the growing issue of FDV in our community
- Continuous improvement of current programs
- Improve communication with families

### Royal Commission Recommendations targeted



### Defence and veteran families wellbeing strategy actions targeted



### Success looks like

*Clear and timely communication for families of veterans with practical navigation and signposting of supports. Families no longer feel as though they “disappear” after transition but are guided into post-ADF life. The concept of Moral Injury extends to families of veterans. DVA staff act as a cohesive unit, guiding families beyond claims to all applicable supports, programs like the Acute Support Package evolve to address emerging and known needs.*

# Focus Area #3

## Enhancement of ESO Partnerships and Supports

### Success looks like

*ESOs are supported to plan for future generations with safe, sustainable, family-centred services. A dedicated family arm within the ESO peak body strengthens advocacy, reduces duplication and promotes safety of programs. Regional access to support is improved through mapped community supports and expanded NGO partnerships. Research is linked to program outcomes, so that families of veterans can confidently connect to the right services and supports.*

### How it's achieved

- Engage with and support ESO growth
- Research and Data for Families

### Royal Commission Recommendations targeted



### Defence and veteran families wellbeing strategy actions targeted



# Focus Area #4

## Build Life Foundations and Cultivate Belonging

### How it's achieved

- Support Family and Partner Training and Employment
- Ensure there is a family-specific focus of the Wellbeing Agency

### Royal Commission Recommendations targeted



### Defence and veteran families wellbeing strategy actions targeted



### Success looks like

*Families of veterans are seen and valued within the veteran community. Programs foster belonging for diverse family structures, supported by strong coordination across DVA, NDIA, health and aged care. Families who lose a veteran receive timely, tailored postvention and grief supports. Investment in psychoeducation, carer supports and education pathways helps families of veterans build sustainable, fulfilling futures.*

# Success Drivers

Collaboration and Partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Build trusted relationships with ESOs, government, and community stakeholders</li><li>• Codesign solutions, share resources, and promote each other's work</li><li>• Strengthen the veteran support ecosystem through long-term collaboration</li></ul>
Evidence and Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use data and insights to shape recommendations and advocacy</li><li>• Identify barriers and track emerging needs through continuous research</li><li>• Measure impact and refine approaches for lasting change</li><li>• Understand and navigate government systems to drive reform</li></ul>
Lived Experience Voices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Embed the perspectives of families of veterans into every stage of work</li><li>• Codesign initiatives with diverse voices, including partners, children and carers</li><li>• Identify legislative and policy gaps and work to resolve them</li><li>• Encourage questioning of the status quo to spark improvement and reform</li></ul>
Effective Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Deliver clear, consistent, and inclusive messaging</li><li>• Share stories and evidence to influence, inspire, and bust myths</li><li>• Tailor communications for government, ESOs, families of veterans, and the broader public</li><li>• Report transparently on progress and impact through annual reviews</li></ul>

# Communications

All our communications do at least one of the following:



## Educate

- Increase awareness of programs, supports and events for families of veterans.
- Showcase the Commissioners as vital connectors.



## Build Trust

- Document wins.
- Showcase the impact of advocacy and services.
- Demonstrate integrity and offer an avenue for those who fall through the cracks.



## Commemorate

- Celebrate our history and traditions, while showing modern relevance.
- Connect past to present to support the future.



## Call to Act

- Provide clear pathways for involvement.
- Demonstrate the measurable impact of having your voice heard.
- Report long term impact.

We utilise the following channels:

<b>Commissions Website</b>	A central hub that provides families with clear, up-to-date access to our work through official information, resources and reports.
<b>Social media (LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram)</b>	Share insights, updates, and thought leadership; amplify family stories and sector initiatives; engage directly with the community and raise awareness of emerging issues or consultations.
<b>Vet Affairs Magazine</b>	Highlight initiatives, policy updates, and case studies; reach a broad veteran audience and key stakeholders in an established, trusted publication.
<b>Forums, webinars, and community events</b>	Gather direct feedback, provide education and foster connection between families, the Commissioners, and sector partners.
<b>Traditional media</b>	Communicate key announcements, national advocacy priorities, and major initiatives to a wide audience; shape public understanding and sector discourse.
<b>Impact reports</b>	Demonstrate outcomes, evidence-informed achievements and accountability; provide transparency on priorities, progress and influence on policy and programs.





# Get in Touch

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