

VETERAN FAMILY COMMISSIONER

2025

Impact  
Statement

# Introduction

The Government's decision to embed a dedicated voice for families of veterans at the highest levels of policy and decision-making ensures that there is a formal avenue for needs of veteran families to be prioritised, and that solutions which help families to thrive can be elevated and acted upon.

My role is to hold the Department of Veterans' Affairs to account, and I have found an organisation that is willing to do the work. Since taking on the Commissioner role, I have seen a genuine commitment to reform, with a culture increasingly focused on learning and improvement. Even in a short time, I have already seen progress.

Another core part of the responsibility of the Veteran Family Commissioner role is to provide clarity about what is changing, and where progress is being made. Communicating impact and outcomes is essential to building understanding and accountability.

I am conscious that change happens at different speeds. Legislation takes time, policy moves a little more quickly, and programs faster still. Across all of this work, I am focused on clearly articulating outcomes and measuring progress.

Although I have only been in the role for four months, it is my commitment to report transparently on impact each year. This statement marks the first step in that ongoing accountability.



Annabelle Wilson  
Veteran Family Commissioner

# The story so far...

The focus this year has been on discovery: understanding where appetite for change exists and building relationships to support delivery. One clear theme to emerge is an appetite for a shift in the way DVA tells its story, recognising this as long-term change and culture-building work. Progress and early outcomes have been achieved across all four defined focus areas, alongside the initiation of larger bodies of work that will continue to mature and deliver impact over time.

## Focus Area 1

Equity of Eligibility  
and Access

## Focus Area 2

Clarity and Improvement of DVA  
Services and Supports for Families

## Focus Area 3

Enhancement of ESO  
Partnerships and Supports

## Focus Area 4

Build Life Foundations  
and Cultivate Belonging

## 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.***

# Focus Area #1

## Equity of Eligibility and Access

### Royal Commission Recommendations targeted



### Defence and veteran families wellbeing strategy actions targeted



## 2025 Outcomes

→ Improvements to Data Capture and Reporting on Families and Family Structures are progressing. By linking insights directly from the voices of families of veterans through the 2021 Census and previous AIHW work, we can fairly quickly set in motion a research stream grounded in lived experience insights, ensuring future programs are shaped by evidence rather than assumptions.

It's also important to me that the next Census poses questions in a way that allows families of veterans to understand that the data collection that applies to them, so they can participate.

→ Working with the Open Arms team has allowed the clear feedback from the 2025 Veteran Family Forum to be operationalised. This has resulted in a review of the Open Arms Model of Care to better support our Children. A specialist consultant will begin designing a needs-based mental health service for children and young people in January 2026.

Open Arms is also strengthening workforce capability, so that staff are better equipped to support children and families, improving access, early intervention and trauma- and military-informed care. In addition, changes to the Treatment Principles now allow Open Arms to expand its Outreach Program to a broader range of providers, increasing access to qualified professionals for veteran children and young people.



# Focus Area #2

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

### Royal Commission Recommendations targeted



### Defence and veteran families wellbeing strategy actions targeted



### 2025 Outcomes

Influenced national discourse by embedding the term “families of veterans” into ministerial and departmental language, clearly distinguishing families as a group with unique needs. This ensures families are recognised in their own right rather than assumed within the broader concept of the veteran community, supporting more targeted and responsive policy.

Secured the inclusion of families in the 2026 ANZMIC conference Moral Injury abstract, positioning them as essential stakeholders in the emerging post-Royal Commission discourse on moral injury. This ensures early research acknowledges the unique burden families carry — including the betrayal felt when navigating complex administrative processes following a veteran’s injury or death — and embeds family perspectives in the foundations of future policy and clinical responses.

By publishing clear links to relevant research papers and activities across the Veteran and Family Wellbeing Hubs network, I’m beginning to position the Commissioner webpage as a resource for veteran families, supporting informed decision-making, strengthening transparency, and connecting families with evidence, initiatives and opportunities across the system.

Established clear and sustainable working rhythms between the Defence Family Advocate and the Veteran Family Commissioner, defining complementary responsibilities and building on each organisation’s strengths. This alignment positions us to better respond to Royal Commission recommendations and deliver a more coordinated, effective advocacy system for families of veterans.



# Focus Area #3

## Enhancement of ESO Partnerships and Supports

Royal Commission Recommendations targeted



Defence and veteran families wellbeing strategy actions targeted



### 2025 Outcomes

Progressed collaborative work with IVA and RSL to strengthen the advocate workforce, including through formal engagement and shared planning. This work is helping build momentum towards a more supported, professional and sustainable advocacy sector, with wellbeing advocates emerging as an important tool for families.

By joining the Research and Evaluation Board, we strengthened strategic oversight of veteran-related research and pushed for a more coherent national focus. This ensures research investment is aligned with community needs and can meaningfully influence service design and policy.

Advocated for Legacy to broaden eligibility criteria to better reflect contemporary service and recognise contribution rather than incapacity. This supports a more inclusive approach that honours service, strengthens family support options, and aligns with modern expectations of fairness in the veteran support system.

Participated in the first nationwide meeting of RSL State Branch CEOs, including sharing my priorities and plans directly with senior leadership, and developing an understanding of their plans and priorities.

This engagement sets the scene for a strong and collaborative ongoing working relationship, and we have made the commitment to continue to meet in this way, as working together influences thinking across the organisation, supporting stronger national alignment and greater momentum for change.



### Statement on Advocacy from the Repatriation Commission

Every year, up to 6,000 Defence personnel transition from the military to civilian life. Most make a successful transition, but some require additional support. The Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) provides a range of health care, support services and financial assistance to those who need it. This support reflects a government commitment over 100 years ago, that we will take care of those who have served in the defence of our nation.

Every day we speak to veterans and their families, many of whom have lived inspiring lives of service, and who have served our nation from DVA. Many of these people receive invaluable assistance. Our Evocative Support Program (ESP) advocates, who guide our community through the claims process with professionalism and care.

While we will continue to put pressure on the Government and the Department to simplify the system, making it easier for veterans to transition to civilian life, we also acknowledge that the advocacy advocate is central to Australia's veteran support system. DVA's own advocacy advocates are not the only ones available. The Legacy (LEGACY) Appeal from supporting veterans and their families through the transition to civilian life. Advocates also provide valuable support and services in the wider veterans community. As such, together we can support the system that those who rely on us are proud of.

We are proud of the majority of advocates who operate with integrity and transparency for their support for veterans and their families.

We are however disturbed to see a few commercial advocates engaging in behaviour that is not consistent with veteran welfare, but rather by commercial gain. Advocates who charge unreasonable amounts of money to veterans to submit their own claims, who are not transparent about their fees, or adopting misleading marketing tactics, are not acting in the best interests of veterans or their families, and it should not be tolerated. We encourage advocates also to provide valuable support and services in the wider veterans community.

We remind our community that paying for advocacy services does not guarantee faster processing times, better claims outcomes or higher compensation payments. All claims follow the same path, starting with the relevant legislation, regardless of whether they are handled by a DVA paid advocate, a free advocate, or by the claimant themselves. If you are looking for an advocate, please be sure to check whether they are practising a large panel of faster service as exchange for a considerably higher fee.

You do not need to give away part of the support that you or your family are entitled to, as it adds value to our country. We will continue to use all the avenues available to us to support our veterans.



have the ability and the choice to interact with DVA however best suits individual circumstances and needs.

Later a national professional association for veterans' advocates, the Australian Institute for Advocacy, will support and guide the sector and set high standards for all advocates. The Institute will also be responsible for registration for advocates, which will require them to operate under a

code of ethics. Visit the [Advocacy Regime](http://AdvocacyRegime.com) to find an advocate near you.

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Amabelle Wilson

Veterans Family Advocate Commissioner

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# Focus Area #4

## Build Life Foundations and Cultivate Belonging

### Royal Commission Recommendations targeted

76 77 87

### Defence and veteran families wellbeing strategy actions targeted

1.2.5 2.6.5 2.9.2  
3.2.7

## 2025 Outcomes

Purchased and delivered curated library packs to community hubs, featuring high-quality children's books written exclusively by defence and veteran spouses. This initiative promotes recognition and familiarity across the hubs network, ensures hubs have the right resources for children's spaces, and supports small businesses and community leaders within the veteran family network.

Participated in the international Knowledge Exchange Event, "Policies and practices to strengthen targeted support to veterans and their families in Ukraine" by sharing how Australia supports veteran families through the Veteran Family Commissioner role, and just as importantly, by reflecting on what we could have done better and the lessons we are still learning. As Ukraine develops new support systems for veterans and their families, the OECD organised this event to help Ukrainian practitioners draw on global experience. It was also an invaluable chance for me to learn from the approaches of countries such as Canada, France, Ukraine and the United Kingdom across policy, service delivery, and mental and physical health supports.



