



Australian Government

Australian Government response to the
Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee report:
Adaptive sport programs for Australian Defence Force veterans

July 2026

Introduction

The Australian Government (the Government) thanks the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee (the Committee) for its report on *Adaptive sport programs for Australian Defence Force veterans* (the Adaptive Sports Report). The Government extends its thanks to the individuals and organisations who took the time to engage with the inquiry and provide submissions.

Comprehensive reform is ongoing

Since the tabling of the Adaptive Sports Report in May 2023, the Government has commenced a substantial and long-term program of reform in response to the Final Report of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide. This represents the most comprehensive reform ever undertaken across the systems, culture, and processes across the Department of Defence and the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA).

To date, 32 of the Royal Commission recommendations have been implemented, with work underway on the remainder. Critically, the Australian Government has committed \$78 million over 4 years from 2025-26 and \$7.5 million per annum ongoing to establish a new agency dedicated to veteran and family wellbeing. This agency commenced operations on 1 July 2026.

In a nation where everyone has a place in sport, the Government encourages veterans to be actively involved in sport programs, activities, and events, either as participants, coaches, officials, or volunteers.

Response to recommendations

Recommendation 1 The committee recommends that the term ‘veterans’ sport’ should be adopted to describe the spectrum of activities from adaptive sports—where modifications of equipment or rules are required to allow veterans with physical injuries to participate—to activities designed to facilitate the inclusion of veterans in community-based sporting clubs as part of transition or rehabilitation from mental health impacts of service.

Agreed-in-principle.

The Government supports the use of inclusive and context-specific language to describe sport as a wellbeing tool for current ADF members and veterans. The use of the term ‘veterans’ sport’ to broadly refer to veterans’ participation in sport as a tool for health, wellbeing, rehabilitation, and transition from the ADF is consistent with this approach, as is the continued use within Defence of the term ‘ADF Adaptive Sport’ to describe funded sporting programs tailored for wounded, injured or ill ADF members to participate.

Recommendation 2 The committee recommends that the focus of veterans’ sports should be on rehabilitation and supporting transition from service for any veteran who wishes to participate, with facilitation of teams for competitive events being an adjunct for the small number of veterans who wish to try out for selection. Government, sporting organisations and codes, and the veteran community should take an active role in supporting this focus.

Agreed.

The Government acknowledges the positive impact that participation in sport can have on a person’s health, wellbeing, and transition from a predominantly ADF Service-centred life to a predominantly civilian-centred life (‘transition’). The Government also recognises the people, organisations, and programs in the Australian sporting ecosystem that contribute to those impacts. While participation in elite-level and competitive international events provides value for some veterans, these events are not suitable for the needs of all veterans. The Government therefore agrees that the focus of veterans’ sport should be on rehabilitation, supporting transition from service and improving access for all veterans who wish to participate.

Defence currently supports access to sport and recreational activities for ADF members who are medically unfit for duty and participating in an occupational rehabilitation program. Where eligible, support is provided through a Meaningful Engagement Program, which aims to prevent the development of secondary mental health problems associated with a lack of purposeful activity. Meaningful Engagement Activities support the implementation of the member’s overall rehabilitation program. Funding is provided for both serving and transitioning members. Defence also considers transition preparedness and personal wellbeing domains when developing individual transition plans for ADF members who are transitioning. Defence Transition Support Officers are able to assist transitioning members identify potential community-based activities, including sports, to help establish post-service social connections. Eligibility for Career Transition Training funding has been expanded to engagement activities, including sporting programs for those leaving full time service.

Eligible clients also have access to psychosocial rehabilitation activities as part of the DVA Rehabilitation Program. Depending on a client’s assessed need and rehabilitation goals, those activities could include participation in sport and/or the provision of necessary sporting aids. More information on the DVA Rehabilitation Program is available on the DVA website.

Recommendation 3 The committee recommends that the criteria underpinning selection of staff for management or coaching roles in events such as the Invictus Games should require—in addition to sporting or management qualifications directly relevant to the role—a commitment and demonstrated capability to ensure veteran rehabilitation as a priority.

Noted.

The Government supports placing veteran wellbeing at the centre of any rehabilitative activities, including sport. This is why when selecting individuals for management or coaching roles, Defence considers their qualifications and sporting experience, and requires that the individuals demonstrate a commitment and capability to prioritising the recovery, rehabilitation, and reintegration of wounded, injured, and ill participants.

Recommendation 4 The committee recommends that the Department of Defence and the Department of Veterans' Affairs align policies to jointly support the Joint Transition Authority to facilitate veterans' sports programs that support transition from service into civilian life.

Noted.

The Government notes that a range of programs and initiatives that can facilitate access to sport to support the rehabilitation and transition of ADF members and veterans are already delivered through Defence and DVA. Effective coordination is a priority when a person is separating from the ADF on medical grounds and transitioning from the Defence Rehabilitation Program to the DVA Rehabilitation Program. If a person's rehabilitation activities include sporting activities, these are considered during the warm handover process as the person transitions between these programs. This will be further supported from 1 July 2026 by the new Veteran and Family Wellbeing Agency, which has been established to better assist with navigation to existing programs and supports for veterans.

Recommendation 5 The committee recommends that the Department of Defence and the Department of Veterans' Affairs assess the benefit of directing some existing funding for rehabilitation programs for veterans (including those still serving) to structured programs such as the Invictus Pathways Program where sport is used as a vehicle to provide physical and mental support to veterans, and making such programs more accessible to veterans across Australia.

Noted.

The DVA Rehabilitation Program provides rehabilitation support to veterans who satisfy the legal requirements of the *Military, Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2004* (MRCA), or historically those also outlined in the *Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation (Defence-related Claims) Act 1988* (DRCA). The aim of this support is to maximise the potential to restore a person who has an impairment, or an incapacity for service or work, as a result of a service-related injury or disease, to at least the same physical and psychological state, and the same social, vocational, and educational status, as they had before their injury or disease.

Rehabilitation activities (such as participation in sport) are supported through the DVA Rehabilitation Program so that any activity can be delivered as part of the fulsome consideration of a veteran's needs. Defence and DVA continuously review and assess policies and programs that provide physical and mental health supports to veteran and serving members.

Recommendation 6 The committee recommends that Department of Veterans' Affairs grant guidelines should be amended to accommodate programs that are specifically targeted at veteran participation in community-based veterans' sport.

Noted.

The Veteran Wellbeing Grants Program, administered by DVA, funds social inclusion and connectedness activities that promote good mental health and wellbeing among the veteran community, which may include sporting or recreational projects for veterans and their families. Organisations can apply for small grants of up to \$50,000 and large grants of between \$50,001 and \$200,000, subject to their eligibility requirement, either as an ex-service organisation (ESO) or as a non-ESO in a consortium with at least one ESO.

From 2022 the Government, through the Veteran Wellbeing Grants Program, has provided grants of over \$10.3 million to 172 organisations to undertake a variety of veteran wellbeing activities, including sport programs. More information on the Veteran Wellbeing Grants Program is available on the DVA website.

DVA will continue to encourage a diverse range of grant applicants and projects to be supported, including those that support participation in sport as a tool for health, wellbeing, psychosocial rehabilitation, and transition from the ADF.

Recommendation 7 The committee recommends that the Department of Veterans' Affairs include in its resourcing advice, as per Recommendation 4 in the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide's Interim Report, to the Australian Government the necessary funding to adequately support community-based veterans sport programs.

Noted.

The Government invested \$11.1 million over 4 years to expand and enhance the existing DVA Demand Driven Funding Model (DDFM) and to support its operations, in response to Recommendation 4 of the Interim Report of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide. Consistent with Recommendation 4, DVA provides advice to Government on its resourcing needs as part of the Budget and Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook processes. Where relevant, this advice includes the resourcing required for the programs and initiatives delivered by DVA that facilitate access to sport to support the rehabilitation and transition of ADF members and veterans.

Recommendation 8 The committee recommends that future Commonwealth funding for veterans' sport to organisations that are not community-based sporting clubs should include conditions regarding a minimum amount that must be "flowed through" to help sustain the delivery of programs at the community level.

Noted.

The Government notes the importance of the wider community in supporting and sustaining a vibrant sporting culture in Australia. However, ongoing investments in veteran rehabilitation, including sporting activities, will continue to be guided by a focus on ensuring positive wellbeing outcomes and program effectiveness.

Recommendation 9 The committee recommends the Department of Defence consider making Reserve days available to the Senior Australian Defence Force Officer in each state or region to engage local veterans—already active in veterans’ sports—to facilitate increased community-based sporting clubs engagement with local ADF units and ex-service organisations as well as support with administration such as grant applications.

Noted.

The Government notes that Defence maintains and resources Base Community Engagement Plans and supports the incorporation of engagement with community-based sporting clubs into these plans. Reserve days are made available, where required, to engage local reservists to facilitate this engagement.

Recommendation 10 The committee recommends that the Department of Defence and the Department of Veterans’ Affairs assess the feasibility of providing a voucher system to encourage and support veterans access to veterans’ sports as part of their transition, and where appropriate, gain relevant vocational qualifications.

Noted.

The Defence Force Transition Program provides up to \$5,320 for Career Transition Training (CTT) for transitioning members who wish to take up employment within sport, in some form, or gain meaningful engagement through sport related programs. The CTT funding aligns with the concept of a voucher system. This may include match officials, coaching, or other sport specific support services. Members seeking to leave full-time service are encouraged to apply for CTT, and to have their existing sporting credentials formally recognised or to gain relevant vocational qualifications through CTT, to enable them to engage more effectively in local community sporting programs.

Recommendation 11 The committee recommends that the Department of Defence and the Department of Veterans’ Affairs work with veteran’s sports stakeholders to design the package of reform that will deliver recommendations 1-10 of this report.

Noted.

While a reform package is not agreed, noting that the majority of recommendations have been noted, Defence and DVA will continue to support veterans’ sport through the programs and initiatives detailed in this response, which are delivering important outcomes for veterans, and will continue to work closely together to support serving and former members of the ADF more broadly.

Recommendation 12 The committee recommends that the Australian Government consider a recommendation to the Governor-General to declare the 2014, 2016, and 2017 Invictus Games as nominated multi-sport events under the Regulations.

Noted

The Government recognises the importance, to both potential individual recipients and the broader Australian community, of honouring participants who represent their country at the Invictus Games.

The 2020 amendments to the Letters Patent and Regulations for the Australian Sports Medal (ASM) enabled appropriate medallic recognition to Australians who, at the highest level, represent their country at international multi-sport events, including the Olympics (Summer and Winter), Paralympics, Special Olympics, Commonwealth Games, Invictus Games and the International Sports Federation for Persons with Intellectual Disability (INAS) Global Games.

Australia's hosting of the 2018 Invictus Games was a key catalyst to the changes made to the ASM and the importance of this 2018 event and the Invictus Games more broadly.

Until these amendments there was no specific award in the Australian Honours and Awards system for participants at eligible international sporting events to receive medallic recognition.

The Government acknowledges that changes made to the ASM do not provide retrospective recognition for Invictus Games participants prior to the 2018 Invictus Games, or indeed, participants of any of the other International Sporting events now specified in the Letters Patent and Regulations.

Extending retrospectivity to one particular medal, or one particular cohort within a medal, has broader implications for the entire Australian Honours and Awards system. The system is founded on considerations of consistency, equity, and fairness. Upholding the integrity of the system as a whole is fundamental to the value Australians place on it.