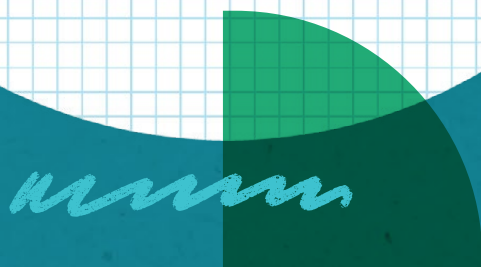




Australian Government

Women Veterans' Strategy 2026–2031

A joint initiative of the Department of Veterans' Affairs
and the Department of Defence



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Accessing support

The Australian Government recognises this Strategy raises issues that may be distressing, particularly for those with lived experience of military service, trauma, or gender-based harm. If you, or someone you know, needs support, the following National and Defence counselling and referral services are available:

Open Arms – Veterans & Families Counselling – Australia's leading provider of military mental health services, offering free and confidential support to veterans and their families. 1800 011 046 or openarms.gov.au

Mates4Mates – A leading charity supporting current and ex-serving ADF members and their families impacted by service. mates4mates.org

1800RESPECT – National service offering confidential information, counselling and support to people impacted by sexual assault, domestic or family violence and abuse. 1800 737 732 or www.1800respect.org.au

13YARN – A 24/7, culturally safe and confidential crisis support line for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. 13 92 76 or www.13yarn.org.au

Lifeline – 24/7 crisis support and suicide prevention services for anyone, any time 13 11 14 or www.lifeline.org.au

Beyond Blue – Support for anxiety, depression and mental health challenges 1300 224 636 or www.beyondblue.org.au

MensLine Australia – Counselling and referral for men experiencing relationship, family or emotional challenges. 1300 789 978 or www.mensline.org.au

QLife – Anonymous and free peer support and referral for LGBTIQ+ people on issues of identity, relationships, and mental health. 1800 184 527 or www.qlife.org.au

Arafmi – Support, counselling, and respite for carers, families and friends of people living with mental illness. 1300 554 660 or www.arafmi.com.au

DMFS Helpline – First point of call for Defence families seeking support, information or connection within their community. 1800 624 608 or www.defence.gov.au/adf-members-families

SeMPRO – Provides immediate and confidential support and advice to persons impacted by sexual violence. 1800 736 776 or www.defence.gov.au/about/contact-us/sexual-misconduct-prevention-response-office

All-hours Support Line – Confidential telephone service for ADF members and their families to facilitate access to ADF or civilian mental health services, including psychology, medical, social work, and chaplain services. 1800 628 036 or www.defence.gov.au/adf-members-families/crisis-support/helplines/all-hours-support-line

Women Veterans' Strategy

The Strategy is a commitment to a future where every woman veteran thrives and lives a fulfilling life – recognised, safe, healthy, economically secure, and valued for her contributions – supported by seamless transitions, quality healthcare, and a deep appreciation of service.



Progress and momentum: where we are today



Increased representation and access

+ Women's participation in the ADF permanent workforce has grown from 13.8% in 2012 to 21%ⁱ.

Including:
24.7% in the Navy
15.1% in the Army
27.5% in the Air Force

+ All ADF roles, including combat and special forces, are now open to women.

+ ADF targets for female representation reflect a continued commitment to inclusion.

25% in ADF
26.5% in the Navy
17% in the Army
32% in the Air Forceⁱⁱ



Cultural reform and accountability

+ Recommendations from numerous reviews have contributed to accountability, such as:

The Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide, the Review into the Treatment of Women in the ADF and the Respect@Work: Sexual Harassment National Inquiry 2020, initiatives such as the 'Pathway to Change,' the Respect@Work Defence Framework, and SeMPRO.

+ The ADF conducts regular culture and climate reviews, including pulse surveys and gender audits.

+ There is independent oversight for handling historical abuse through the Defence Force Ombudsman.



Gender-specific health improvements

+ Women's health assessments are now embedded in ADF medical screenings and periodic health checks.

+ Tailored equipment (e.g., body armour and uniforms) is available for women.

+ DVA offers free mental health care for any white card holders, with available access to gender-informed care for SERCAT 6 and 7 personnel.



Employment and transition initiatives

+ Women veterans are more likely to work full-time than their civilian counterparts.ⁱⁱⁱ

+ Career transition programs are expanding to include women-specific supports, including peer mentoring pilots.

+ The Joint Transition Authority is working to improve cross-agency continuity for women leaving the service.



Public recognition and community voice

+ Women are increasingly represented in commemorations and national veteran campaigns.

+ Women-led veteran organisations are contributing actively to advocacy and national consultation processes.

+ Defence and DVA engage regularly with women veterans to inform service design, claims reform, and program evaluation.

ⁱ Defence Workforce Report 1 August 2026

ⁱⁱ Department of Defence (2025), Women in the ADF Report 2024–25, pp. 11–12.

ⁱⁱⁱ Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2022). *Characteristics of previous Australian Defence Force personnel, Labour force status of people aged 15–64*.

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Acknowledgements

The Australian Government acknowledges and pays respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across Australia, the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the land and waters and the oldest continuous living culture on Earth. We pay respects to Elders past and present and acknowledge the positive legacy left by ancestors.

Respect is also extended to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have served – and continue to serve – in the defence of Australia in times of peace and war.

The Australian Government honours the service and sacrifice of all Australians who have served in the Australian Defence Force, and those currently serving to protect our nation.

This Strategy has been shaped by the voices, strength and insight of women veterans who spoke up, shared their stories, and called for change. Their experiences have formed the foundation and momentum for this work.

The Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) and the Department of Defence acknowledge that for many women, serving their country is a deep source of pride, which continues into civilian life. We also acknowledge those who continue to rebuild and recover from the lasting impacts of military life – including injury, disability and moral injury.

DVA and Defence acknowledge the vital role that carers and family members play in supporting veterans, often carrying their own service-experiences and sacrifices. Their strength, resilience and care are integral to the wellbeing of veterans and the broader veteran community.

DVA and Defence thank the many individuals and organisations who support women veterans every day. Your tireless advocacy, care and advice have contributed directly to this Strategy.

Introduction

The Australian Defence Force's greatest asset is its people, whose selflessness and sacrifice is unparalleled. We must look after them. The women who make the decision to serve and wear our nation's uniform deserve the enduring commitment of their government and this Strategy forms part of the Australian Government's response to that call.

More women are serving in the Australian Defence Force (ADF) than ever before, making up 21% of the permanent workforce and 18.9% of the reserve workforce as at 1 August 2026¹.

By 2030, the Government aims to increase women's participation across the permanent ADF to 25%, with targets of 26.5% in the Navy, 17% in the Army and 32% in the Air Force². The Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) projects a 17.2% growth in the number of veterans (both women and men) accessing services over the next 10 years³. This will significantly increase the demand for veteran support programs and require expanded infrastructure to meet the evolving needs of this growing population.

While growth in number is an indication of great progress for women's service in the ADF, it brings both new opportunities and new responsibilities. In recent years, the ADF has taken significant steps to improve its culture, and create a safer, more inclusive and respectful environment for all personnel. Reforms have included strengthening accountability mechanisms, embedding values-based leadership, and implementing measures to prevent and respond to unacceptable behaviour, including sexual violence and bullying. The ADF has also prioritised diversity and inclusion initiatives, expanded support services, and sought to foster a culture that reflects both community expectations, and the lived experiences of its members. While these reforms mark meaningful progress, the ADF has committed to sustained improvement to ensure it continues to be a safe, respectful and inclusive place to serve.

Women represent a vital and growing segment of the ADF and work in critical areas like digital, cybersecurity, engineering, strategy, intelligence and leadership – which are vital for national security. Supporting women veterans throughout their service and when transitioning is crucial to maximising Australia's defence capability and ensuring we maintain a highly skilled workforce into the future.

The creation of Australia's first national Women Veterans' Strategy embodies the Government's commitment to support women veterans across their service and post-service lifecycle, strengthen capability across a growing workforce, and ensure the ADF remains a world leading military organisation.

Women veterans need access to tailored support that reflects their specific physical and social needs and supports their transition into civilian life. By recognising and addressing these distinct experiences, the Strategy will contribute to improving women's health and wellbeing, support better transition, and improve long-term civilian workforce outcomes.

Whether serving in the ADF, or once post-service life begins, the entire veteran service system benefits when the strengths, capability, all forms of contribution and needs of women are fully integrated.

¹ Defence Workforce Report 1 August 2026

² Department of Defence (2025), *Women in the ADF Report 2024–25*, pp. 11–12.

³ Department of Veterans' Affairs. (n.d.). *DVA projected beneficiary numbers*.

Geographic distribution of women veterans who ever served in the ADF⁴

	Currently serving in the regular service	Currently serving in the reserves service	Previously served	Total ever served
New South Wales	3,900 (4.6%)	1,184 (1.4%)	14,905 (17.7%)	19,997 (23.8%)
Victoria	1,466 (1.7%)	660 (0.8%)	11,275 (13.4%)	13,403 (15.9%)
Queensland	3,305 (3.9%)	1,291 (1.5%)	20,403 (24.3%)	24,997 (29.7%)
South Australia	703 (0.8%)	419 (0.5%)	5,631 (6.7%)	6,762 (8.0%)
Western Australia	953 (1.1%)	445 (0.5%)	8,135 (9.7%)	9,535 (11.3%)
Tasmania	70 (0.1%)	137 (0.2%)	2,725 (3.2%)	2,929 (3.5%)
Northern Territory	817 (1.0%)	120 (0.1%)	879 (1.0%)	1,818 (2.2%)
Australian Capital Territory	1,554 (1.8%)	423 (0.5%)	2,673 (3.2%)	4,652 (5.5%)
Total	12,791 (15.2%)	4,683 (5.6%)	66,639 (79.2%)	84,108 (100.0%)

Note: small rounding adjustments are made to all cell values to protect the confidentiality of data. These adjustments may cause the sum of the above rows or columns to vary by small amounts from table totals.

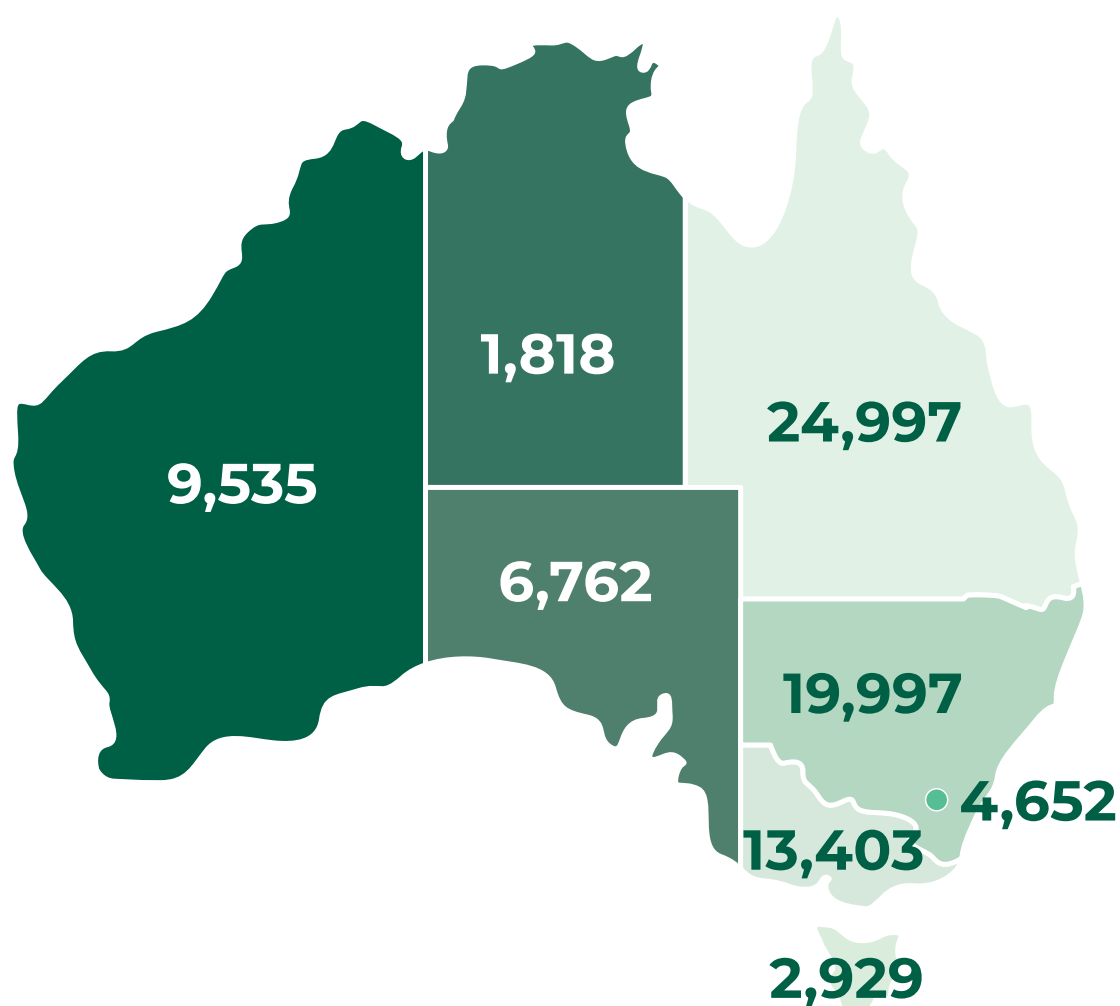
⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2021). *Census of population and housing: Service with the Australian Defence Force data summary* (Table 3)

Our goals are to ensure women veterans receive the respect, recognition, and care they deserve – during service, throughout transition, and beyond.

This Strategy follows recent reviews across Defence, DVA and the ADF – including the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide (RCDVS), the Review into the Treatment of Women in the Australian Defence Force, and the 2024 Capability Review of Veterans Affairs – which have highlighted the experiences of women in the ADF.

Building a fair, effective and future focused veteran support system requires specific regard to the voices and experiences of all women veterans.

Geographic distribution of women veterans who ever served in the ADF⁵



⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2021). Census of population and housing: Service with the Australian Defence Force data summary (Table 3)

Defence context

Australia's security and prosperity are inseparable. Our future depends on protecting our economic connections, maintaining a favourable strategic balance in the Indo-Pacific, upholding the rules-based international order, and contributing to collective security with allies and partners. The 2023 Defence Strategic Review and 2024 National Defence Strategy (NDS) identified a deteriorating strategic environment characterised by intensifying geostrategic competition and increasing risks to Australia's security interests. The 2026 NDS assesses that these trends have broadened and accelerated, creating a more dangerous, contested and unpredictable security environment. In response, Defence is directed to strengthen Australia's capacity to generate, employ and sustain credible military power capable of defending Australia and its interests, including in circumstances where support from allies and partners may be constrained.

The 2026 NDS reinforces Defence's Strategy of Denial, requiring an integrated and focused force able to deter conflict across all domains, protect Australia's approaches and economic lifelines, and operate effectively alongside allies and regional partners. Delivering this strategy requires more than advanced platforms and modernised capabilities. It requires a professional, skilled and resilient workforce capable of generating sustained military advantage.

Accordingly, the NDS recognises workforce growth, retention and readiness as strategic imperatives. Achieving the Government's objective of growing the permanent ADF to 69,000 personnel in the early 2030s requires Defence to attract, retain and develop the broadest possible pool of talent. The participation, inclusion and advancement of women are therefore not only matters of equity and representation, but operational necessities that directly contribute to Defence capability, preparedness and warfighting effectiveness. As Defence adapts to meet the demands of this strategic environment, culture remains a critical enabler of mission success. To defend Australia and its national interests, the ADF must operate as a high-performing team founded on trust, professionalism and shared purpose. This requires a culture that fosters excellence through an inclusive, respectful, resilient and diverse workforce. Our culture reflects not only what we do, but how we do it. It is expressed through our daily behaviours, leadership practices and commitment to the Defence Values.

Culture is fundamental to Defence's ability to generate and sustain military capability. It underpins attraction and retention, strengthens operational effectiveness, enhances team performance and enables Defence to harness the full potential of its people. As the 2026 NDS drives the transformation of Defence into a more integrated and capable force, deliberate and sustained investment in culture is as important as investment in people, platforms and technology. Defence Values and Behaviours remain at the centre of Defence culture. They establish the standards of conduct that enable trust, inclusion, performance and accountability, ensuring Defence remains a profession of arms capable of delivering the outcomes required by the NDS.





Women veterans baseline data report



Leadership, identity and workforce composition

In 2021

85,000
women veterans
lived in
Australia

14.5% of the total veteran populationⁱ

As at 30 June 2025

Women comprised



21.8%

of one-star rank and above officers in the ADF Permanent Forcesⁱⁱ

Compared to civilian women, who held **37.5%** of director positions across ASX 300 companies.ⁱⁱⁱ

As at 1 August 2026

21%
of the permanent ADF workforce were women

Women make up:

27.5% of the Air Force

15.1% of the Army

24.7% of the Navy^{iv}



Transition & ex-Serving

In 2024–2025

The average length of service for a non-officer woman in the ADF was
8 years

Compared to **10.1 years** for male veterans^v

In 2024–2025

The separation rate for permanent workforce ADF women was
7%

Compared to **8.1%** for men^{vi}

As of 2021

13.4% of ex-serving ADF veterans were women^{vii}



Education, employment and economic equality

As of 2021



30%

of women veterans held a bachelor degree or higher

This is **1.4x more** likely than male veterans^{viii}

Despite higher educational attainment than male veterans, women experienced poorer employment outcomes following transition.

As of 2024

For men, employment likelihood was increased by:

~63% for having a certificate or diploma

64% for having a university level education

Compared with having a primary or secondary level education at time of transition^{ix}

As of 2021–2022^x

The **gender pay gap** measures the difference in average earnings between men and women across the workforce. Over time, lower earnings and time out of the workforce contribute to a **gender superannuation gap**, typically measured among people approaching retirement (aged 60–64 years old).

	Gender pay gap	Superannuation gap
Currently permanent	11.8% ▼ \$200 less per week	45.7% ▼ \$129,637 lower super balance
Currently reserves	20% ▼ \$338 less per week	14.2% ▼ \$45,165 lower super balance
Previously served but no longer	N/A	20.6% ▼ \$45,197 lower super balance
National workforce	12% ▼ \$238 less per week	25.1% ▼ \$53,190 lower super balance



Mental and physical health

Between 1997–2024

19,937 veterans died
1,398 were women (7%)

1,907 died by suicide
148 were women (8%)^{xi}

In the same time period:

The **top 5 leading causes of death** for ex-serving veterans were:^{xii}

Women:

- 10.4%** Suicide
- 10.1%** Breast cancer
- 8.0%** Lung cancer
- 4.3%** Colorectal cancer
- 4.2%** Accidental poisoning
4.2% Coronary heart disease

As of 2022–2024

The suicide rate per year for ex-serving women was

8 per 100,000 people

This is considerably higher than the age standardised rate for all Australian women of **5.5 per 100,000 people**^{xiii}

In 2019–2020

41.2% of ex-serving women veterans were living with a chronic condition

Compared to:

38.7% of male veterans
40.9% of civilian Australian women^{xiv}

As the veteran population is generally older than the broader Australian population, they are more likely to experience chronic health conditions, disability and complex care needs, resulting in comparatively poorer health and wellbeing outcomes.

Men:

- 12.4%** Coronary heart disease
- 8.7%** Suicide
- 7.0%** Lung cancer
- 3.9%** Colorectal cancer
- 3.3%** Land transport accident



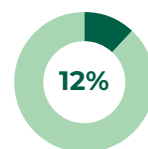
Gender-based violence

In 2024–2025

215 sexual offenses were reported to the joint military police unit

A **29%** increase from the previous year^{xv}

A 2023 survey of permanent ADF members found that



of women reported experiencing sexual misconduct in the past 12 months

Compared to **3%** of men^{xvi}

A 2022 ADF survey found

52% of current serving women had also experienced unacceptable behaviour

Compared to **33%** of male veterans^{xvii}

This includes instances of sexual harassment and misconduct, as well as broader inappropriate workplace behaviours.



Delivering unpaid care

As of 2024

Women who had children were **57% less likely** to be employed after transitioning out of the ADF

Compared to women without children.^{xviii}

Having children **minimally affected** male veterans' civilian employment outcomes.

As of 2025

Women perform **~9 hours more unpaid care work** per week

Compared to men^{xix}

As of 2022

68% of primary unpaid carers are women^{xx}

Our vision for women veterans

Vision

Women Veterans' Strategy is a commitment to a future where every woman veteran thrives and lives a fulfilling life – recognised, safe, healthy, economically secure, and valued for her contributions – supported by seamless transitions, quality healthcare, and a deep appreciation of service.

Achieving this vision will enable the Australian Government to continue improving the experiences and outcomes of women veterans at every stage of their service journey.

This Strategy sets a clear path to strengthen the visibility and recognition of women veterans, ensuring their voices are reflected in leadership, policy design and community life. It will focus our efforts on delivering inclusive health and mental health care that responds to women's needs, including reproductive health, preventative care, trauma recovery and the long-term impacts of service.

The Strategy will support ongoing efforts to prevent abuse and unacceptable behaviour, while strengthening trust through victim-survivor-centred approaches. It will help improve women's economic security through expanded employment opportunities, smoother career transitions and greater financial resilience. By recognising the impact of unpaid care responsibilities, it will better support women veterans with caregiving responsibilities to balance their careers, service and family commitments.

The Strategy also focuses on building smarter, more gender-responsive systems that connect services across Defence, DVA, government, academia and the veteran community. By strengthening coordination and collaboration, it will reinforce these efforts and help ensure lasting change for current and future generations of women veterans.

The focus areas are mutually reinforcing and designed to support women veterans by increasing the visibility of their experiences, reducing and mitigating harm, and advancing equity across the veteran community. Together, they form the foundation of a modern, inclusive veteran support system that reflects the changing demographics of the ADF and the needs of women veterans. In doing so, they will help strengthen the ADF as an employer of choice and contribute to better outcomes for current and future generations of women veterans.



How this Strategy aligns across Government

This Strategy builds on decades of leadership and reform across Defence, as well as the sustained advocacy of women veterans, ex-service organisations and allies across the military and veteran community. It draws together expertise and leadership from the ADF, Defence and DVA, informed by insights from health and legal services, academia, frontline organisations and all levels of government.

By bringing these efforts together under the Women Veterans' Strategy, the Australian Government is creating a coordinated pathway for lasting change.

This is not a standalone initiative. The Strategy is designed to align with, inform and reinforce broader national reforms, strategies and programs that support gender equality, health and wellbeing, workforce participation, safety and inclusion. These include *Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality*; the *Defence and Veteran Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2025–2030*; the *Defence Strategy for Preventing and Responding to Family and Domestic Violence 2023–2028*; the *Women in the ADF Report 2023–24*; Repatriation Commission initiatives; the Australian Human Rights Commission's *Women's Health Project* and *ADF Respect@Work Project*; the *Defence Culture Blueprint*; the *ADF Performance Framework for Gender Inclusion*; the *ADF Employment Offer Modernisation Program*; the *ADF Recruitment and Retention Program*; the *Defence Workforce Plan*; and the *ADF Leave Framework*.

The Strategy also supports the objectives of the *National Women's Health Strategy 2020–2030*, *Wiyi Yani U Thangani (Women's Voices)*, the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032*, and the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*. Through this alignment, the Strategy helps ensure that women veterans are recognised, included and supported as part of Australia's broader reform agenda.

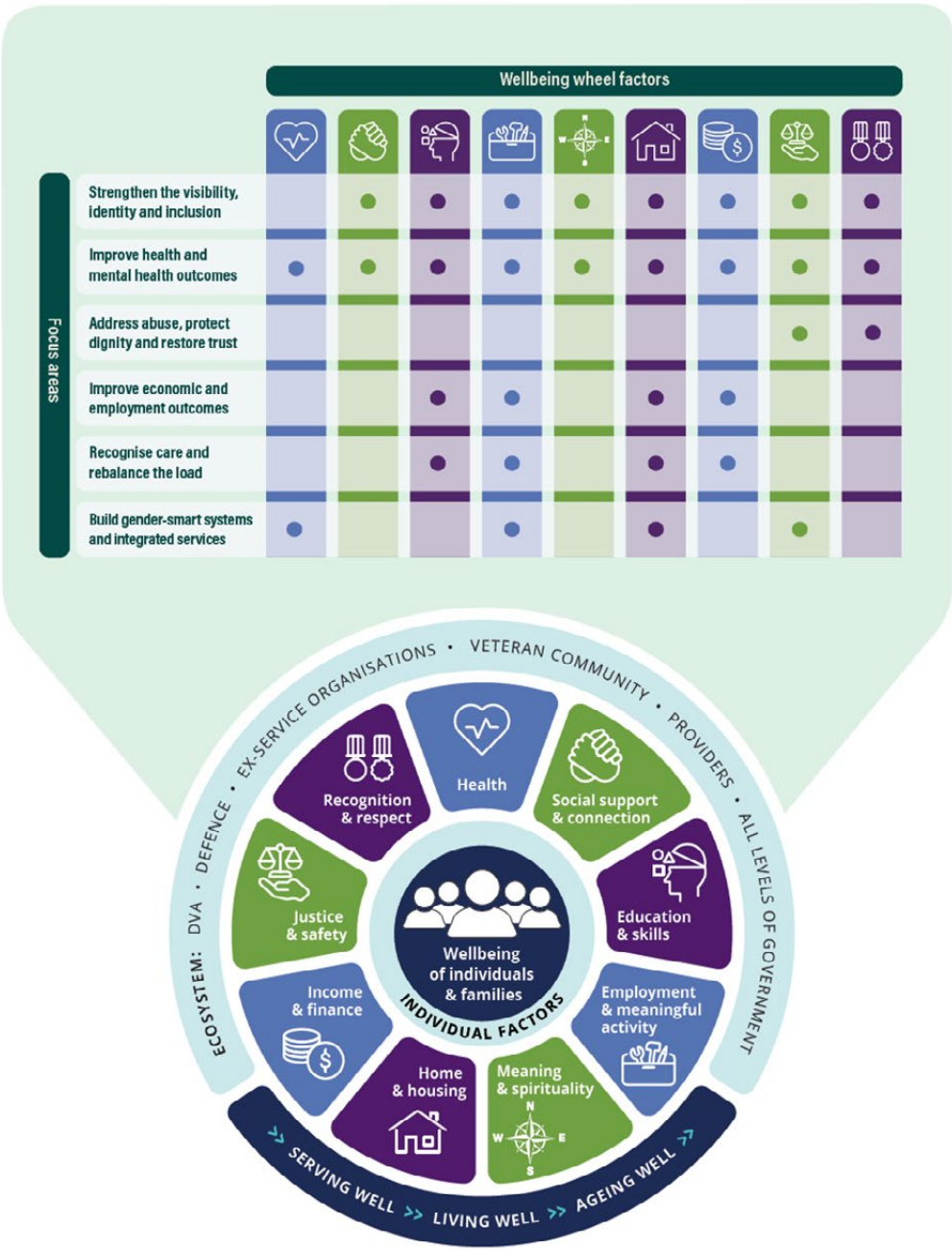
Intersections with existing government strategies, plans and work programs

	Health	Mental health	Safety	Economic security	Homelessness	Defence culture	Recruitment
Defence and DVA Family Wellbeing Action Plan 2024	✓		✓				
Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Report on the Review into the Treatment of Women in the Australian Defence Force						✓	✓
National Women's Health Strategy 2020–2030	✓	✓					
National Digital Health Strategy 2023–2028	✓	✓					
National Suicide Prevention Strategy 2025–2035		✓					
National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032		✓	✓			✓	
Defence and Veteran Family and Wellbeing Strategy 2025–2030 and Action Plan	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Defence and Veteran Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2025–2030		✓					
Defence Work Health and Safety Strategy 2023–2028			✓			✓	
Defence DVA Veteran Transition Strategy	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
DVA Family and Domestic Violence Strategy 2020–2025			✓				
Defence Strategy for Preventing and Responding to Family and Domestic Violence 2023–2028 and Action Plan			✓			✓	
Defence Gender, Peace and Security Governance Framework						✓	
Defence Workforce Plan	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Defence Culture Blueprint	✓	✓	✓			✓	
Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		

Alignment with the Defence and DVA Wellbeing Factors⁶

The Strategy and its six focus areas have been mapped against the Defence and DVA Wellbeing Factors to demonstrate how it underpins holistic wellbeing. This mapping highlights the complementary relationship between the Strategy’s priorities and the Defence and DVA’s comprehensive approach to physical, mental, social, spiritual, family, and occupational wellbeing.

By aligning each focus area with the nine broad elements that impact an individual’s wellbeing, the Strategy reinforces a shared commitment to a cohesive and integrated model of wellbeing that supports women veterans across all aspects of their lives.



⁶ Department of Defence. (2023–24). *Defence Annual Report*, 131

Intersectionality

Stakeholder consultations consistently emphasised that the effective implementation of the Women Veterans' Strategy must reflect the diversity of women veterans. Women veterans are not a homogenous group, and their experiences are shaped by a range of intersecting factors, including service history, culture, ethnicity, Indigeneity, language, sexuality, religion, disability, age and geographic location. This Strategy recognises this diversity and adopts an intersectional approach to ensure that policies, programs and services are designed to respond to the needs of all women veterans, including First Nations women, women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, women with disability, and LGBTQIA+ veterans.

Consistent with the *2026 National Defence Strategy*, it recognises that building and retaining a diverse workforce is critical to Defence capability and long-term workforce sustainability. Defence and veteran systems must be equipped to support the full diversity of people who serve and have served.

Intersectionality provides a framework for designing modern, inclusive systems that recognise and respond to different lived experiences. For Defence, the ADF and DVA, this means moving beyond one-size-fits-all approaches towards policies, programs and services that better reflect the diversity of the veteran community and respond to individual needs.

Throughout the life of the Strategy, an intersectional lens will help ensure that reforms, services and supports are safe, inclusive, culturally responsive and effective. By considering how different forms of disadvantage can interact and compound over time, the Strategy seeks to deliver better outcomes for all women veterans, while ensuring that no group is overlooked.



Intersectionality of women veterans⁷

Serving women and women veterans		Comparison
 Indigenous Identity	3.4% identified as being Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, including: 4.8% of women currently serving in the permanent forces; 3.5% of women currently serving in the reserves; and 3.1% of women who served in the ADF but no longer serve.	This compares to: 2.4% of male counterparts; and 2.7% of women who had never served
 Location	14% live in a regional or remote location, including: 15.8% of women currently serving in the permanent forces; 12.1% of women currently serving in the reserves; and 13.8% of women who served in the ADF but no longer serve.	This compares to: 13.7% of male counterparts; and 9.2% of women who had never served
 Disability	9.8% identified having a need for assistance with a core activity, including: 1.6% of women currently serving in the permanent forces; 1.3% of women currently serving in the reserves; and 12% of women who served in the ADF but no longer serve.	This compares to: 12% of male counterparts; and 7% of women who had never served
 Cultural Identity	28.9% of all permanent ADF personnel identified as having a culturally and linguistically diverse background	
 LGBTQIA+ Identity	5.6% identified as being in a same-sex partnership, or having a de facto partner, including: 9% of women currently serving in the permanent forces; 7.6% of women currently serving in the reserves; and 4.9% of women who served in the ADF but no longer serve.	This compares to: 0.5% of male counterparts; and 1.4% of women who had never served

⁷ Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2021). *Census of population and housing: Service with the Australian Defence Force data summary*

Women Veterans' Strategy at a glance

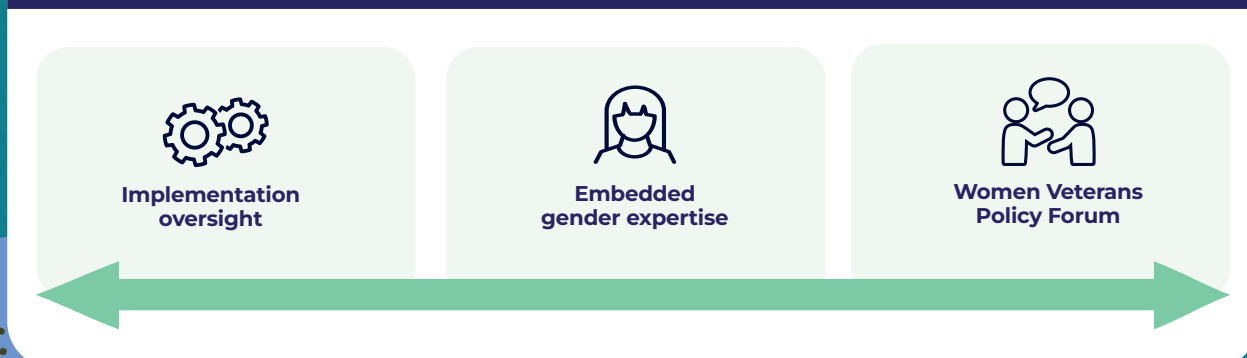
Focus areas



Life course of women veterans



Governance of strategy



Our plan for women veterans

The six focus areas of the Strategy form a single, integrated reform agenda to improve outcomes for women veterans throughout their service and beyond. Together, they reflect the Australian Government's commitment to fairness, dignity, safety and opportunity, recognising that meaningful progress requires coordinated action across health, safety, employment, care, recognition and systems reform.

These focus areas are mutually reinforcing. Greater visibility, inclusion and recognition can strengthen trust and support help-seeking. Gender-responsive health care can improve wellbeing, workforce participation and family outcomes. Economic security and support for caregiving responsibilities can reduce long-term disadvantage. Gender-responsive systems can help ensure reforms are sustained and continue to deliver benefits over time.

This Strategy is not a standalone initiative. It is deliberately aligned with, and builds on, the Government's broader reform agenda. By bringing these efforts together through a women-centred lens, the Women Veterans' Strategy provides a clear and coordinated roadmap for action, helping to ensure reforms translate into meaningful and lasting improvements for women who serve, and have served, Australia.



Focus areas



Focus area 1:

Strengthen the visibility, identity and inclusion of all women veterans across institutions, policy and community life

Women have always served Australia with skill, commitment and courage, and their contribution is fundamental to our national security and civic life. As women's participation in the ADF continues to grow, our systems of recognition, representation and inclusion must evolve to reflect this reality. Ensuring women veterans are visible, respected and included is more than a matter of recognition. It is essential to building a veteran support system that reflects the modern ADF and the values of fairness, respect and inclusion that Australians expect.

This focus area is centred on strengthening visibility, belonging and voice. The actions that follow seek to elevate the leadership and contributions of women veterans, embed their lived experience in policy and decision-making, and ensure institutions, services and public narratives reflect the full diversity of those who serve and have served.

By increasing visibility and inclusion, we can strengthen trust, improve access to support and services, and help ensure women veterans are recognised, respected and valued at every stage of their service journey and beyond.

Focus area 1 actions:

1. Embed women veterans' representation into governance, advisory bodies and national commemorations

- Establish the role of Principal Women's Adviser in the Department of Veterans' Affairs.
- Increase women veterans' representation in key DVA advisory and engagement structures, including the Ex-Service Organisation Round Table and the Veteran Employment Advisory Committee.
- Ensure gender parity across all veteran and Defence advisory bodies, ministerial councils, and consultative fora in line with the Government's targets for [Gender Balance on Australian Government Boards](#).
- Increase women veterans' attendance and recognition at national commemorations and ceremonial events.

2. Transform public narratives, institutional visibility and recognition

- Strengthen the sustainability and capability of women-focused ex-service organisations to ensure women veterans' voices are represented and influential in policy, reform and service design.
- Work in collaboration with ex-service organisations to strengthen representation of diverse identities within the veteran community.
- Establish a women veterans' history and archive project with the Australian War Memorial and National Archives of Australia.
- Elevate the visibility of women veterans by increasingly featuring them in campaigns, commemorations and military service narratives that shape Australia's understanding of service.
- Undertake research examining how military careers shape women veterans' identity, belonging and post service transition.



Focus area 2:

Improve health and mental health outcomes



Australia has a responsibility to ensure that every woman who serves can access high-quality, timely and appropriate health care throughout her service, during transition, and beyond. Women veterans demonstrate strength and resilience, but evidence shows that health systems have not always been designed to meet their specific needs, particularly in areas such as mental health, suicide prevention, reproductive health and trauma-informed care.

This focus area is centred on improving health and mental health outcomes for women veterans by building a system that delivers the right care at the right time. The actions that follow prioritise prevention, early intervention, continuity of care and coordinated support, recognising that good health is fundamental to quality of life, workforce participation, family wellbeing and long-term economic security.

The Strategy will support more equitable and gender-responsive approaches to health care, ensuring services better recognise and respond to the diverse experiences and needs of women veterans. By improving access to care, strengthening support across the service and transition journey, and promoting better health outcomes over the long term, this focus area will contribute to a stronger and more effective veteran support system for all.

Focus area 2 actions:

3. Establish a whole-of-lifecycle women veterans' health framework

- Establish a longitudinal study examining women veterans' health and wellbeing.
- Embed a gender lens across the Defence Health System by establishing a joint women's health framework that focuses on prevention, early intervention and seamless access to gender-responsive care, supported by the continued appointment of dedicated clinical health roles within the ADF to deliver specialist women's health expertise and support the delivery of the Defence Health Strategy.
- Develop a dedicated Women Veterans' Health module for the Veterans eLearning Platform to equip GPs and health professionals with increased knowledge of gender-specific conditions and care pathways.
- Continue to progress pathways for Defence-held health information in Defence enterprise electronic health records to be integrated with National systems.
- Promote availability of women's health coordinators and practitioners with specific expertise in gynaecology, endocrinology, pain, reproductive and sexual health, and trauma to serving women
- Adapt ADF health environments to increase women's privacy and safety when navigating gender-specific health concerns and ensure appropriate equipment necessary for gender-specific care.
- Continue to provide gender-based prevention programs and care for gender-specific matters to minimise injury risk and support wellbeing.
- Open Arms to expand access to sexual violence related supports to serving and ex-serving women, including specialist services and safe reporting pathways.
- Improve women veterans' access to gender-responsive injury prevention supports under the DVA claims process.
- Ensure a gender analysis is undertaken on equipment strategies and improve promotion and communications of changes over time.
- Continue providing women with access to properly fitting uniforms, protective gear, and equipment tailored to their bodies, reducing injury, enhancing safety, and supporting dignity in service.
- Embed menopause and perimenopause care within the joint women's health framework, ensuring early identification and gender-responsive clinical pathways are integrated across ADF and DVA health services.

4. Strengthen gender responsiveness within DVA health entitlements and claims processes

- Commission the Repatriation Medical Authority to undertake a review of the Statement of Principles (SoPs) relating to women's health issues and to determine if additional SoPs, or changes to existing SoPs, are required to address gender bias and ensure conditions experienced by women are appropriately supported and recognised.
- Model alternative approaches to veteran healthcare eligibility and entitlements to assess whether broader healthcare coverage could improve outcomes for women veterans.
- Develop a Women Veterans Clinical Guide on gender-specific conditions, trauma-informed care and referral pathways.
- Update claims guidance to recognise the physical and psychological dimensions of female sexual dysfunction.
- Develop and embed a mandatory gender literacy module within existing DVA induction and training arrangements for frontline and claims staff.
- Commission research on the long-term reproductive health impact of military service.
- Update the Veteran Advocate Register to enable veterans to identify advocates by gender.
- Strengthen advocate capability in relation to women veterans' experiences and gender-specific conditions.
- Ensure aged care and hospital intake processes recognise veteran status and respond to gender specific needs.

5. Strengthen suicide prevention and postvention for women veterans

- Develop and pilot a women specific suicide prevention and postvention peer support program.
- Research the health and wellbeing needs of women veterans to understand their health and wellbeing needs both during transition from the ADF and throughout their post-service lives.
- Open Arms to undertake a gender analysis of the model of care and explore enhancements to suicide prevention and postvention strategies offered to women veterans.
- Expand integrated mental health support services across Open Arms to specifically address the needs of women veterans, including increased supports for military sexual trauma, abuse and gender-based violence.
- Deliver a women veterans' peer support and recovery program that provides safe spaces, peer connection and tailored support to improve transition and wellbeing outcomes for women veterans, including women who have experienced sexual violence.

6. Embed continuity of care for women veterans

- Embed health transition pathways and transition care plans into Defence transition processes to ensure continuity of care across mental, physical, sexual and reproductive health needs.
- Ensure the Veteran and Family Wellbeing Agency offers gender responsive services.
- Veteran and Family Wellbeing Agency to undertake a gender analysis of transition supports to ensure Transition Coaches and other service navigation supports are gender-responsive and integrate a health focus.



Focus area 3:

Address violence, abuse, and unacceptable behaviour, protect dignity and increase trust

Every person who serves Australia has the right to do so in a safe, respectful and inclusive environment. There is no place for sexual violence in Australia, and there is no place for sexual violence in the Australian Defence Force. However as noted in the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032*, violence against women and children is a problem of epidemic proportions in Australia and women experience disproportionate impacts from harassment, abuse and violence, which impacts health, wellbeing, trust and participation.

This focus area is centred on preventing harm, strengthening accountability and improving support for those affected by abuse, violence and unacceptable behaviour. The actions that follow build on existing reforms and place a strong emphasis on prevention, early intervention and victim-survivor-centred responses. They seek to strengthen the systems that protect women, support recovery and healing, and contribute to safer and more inclusive environments across the service and veteran journey.

Addressing harm is essential to improving wellbeing, restoring trust and ensuring women feel safe, respected and supported throughout their interactions with Defence and the veteran support system. By continuing to strengthen culture, accountability and support, this focus area will help build confidence in the institutions that serve those who have served Australia.

Focus area 3 actions:

7. Strengthen prevention, leadership accountability and culture reform in Defence

- Continue to maintain and reinforce clear physical safety standards, behavioural expectations, and disciplinary protocols related to sexual offences.
- Support the capability of military investigators and complaint-handling units through ongoing gender-sensitive training and independent oversight.
- Continue to foster organisational culture and leadership accountabilities for the Defence Corporate Plan which relates to values and behaviours to increase serving women veterans' wellbeing and safety.

8. Strengthen reporting, response and pathways for sexual harassment and assault

- Defence to inquire into the effectiveness of anonymous reporting options including awareness, uptake and impact compared to alternative approaches.

9. Embed trauma-informed DVA responses to Military Sexual Trauma (MST) and Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

- Enhance Open Arms' response to MST through specialist workforce training and the incorporation of MST trauma into its service model.
- Open Arms to expand women veteran's access to MST and complex trauma supports post-transition through trauma-informed clinicians, specialist services and safe referral pathways.
- DVA to identify any gaps in its system responses to women veterans with overlapping or marginalised identities to ensure practice remains culturally competent and trauma informed.
- Continue to provide specialised support through DVA's Specialised Case Team for veterans with sensitive and complex claims including those relating to GBV and MST.

10. Strengthen recovery and long-term trauma supports

- Develop coordinated transition care plans for women impacted by military sexual violence, focused on the immediate period of transition from the ADF.
- Expand partnerships between mainstream family and domestic violence services, including 1800RESPECT, to improve access and quality of care for women veterans and their families.
- Commission research to understand how common military sexual trauma is among current and former members of the Australian Defence Force consistent with Recommendation 14 of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide.



Focus area 4:

Improve economic and employment outcomes

Women veterans bring valuable skills, leadership and experience that contribute to Australia's economic and social prosperity. However structural barriers, including shorter service careers, interrupted workforce participation, unequal caring responsibilities, limited access to flexible work arrangements and gaps in retirement savings, can affect economic outcomes during and after service.

This focus area recognises that economic security is fundamental to wellbeing, independence and opportunity. The actions that follow focus on improving workforce retention, strengthening transition pathways, recognising and translating military skills and experience, and supporting women veterans to access secure, meaningful and rewarding employment.

Economic security supports not only individual wellbeing, but also stronger families, communities and long-term workforce participation. By reducing barriers to employment and career progression, and supporting women veterans to build financial resilience throughout their lives, this focus area will help ensure Australia benefits from the full contribution of those who have served.

Focus area 4 actions:

11. Strengthen gender equity within ADF workforce design and career structures

- Increase gender representation throughout ADF career management, including in ADF employment categories, deployments, and postings.
- Require the ADF to report as a relevant employer to Workplace Gender Equality Agency and audit its pay equity performance annually.
- Strengthen gender capability within Defence by embedding programs that support leadership, mentoring, and career progression for women.
- Review all allowances and bonuses through a gender lens, to consider their impact on the ADF's gender pay gap; including capability payments that are enduring and linked to time-based tier progression.

12. Improve career flexibility and retention without economic penalty

- Improve the formalised system for job sharing and Flexible Work Arrangements, aligned with the demands of care across the ADF workforce, including better access to parental leave and flexible working arrangements for serving men.
- Review the ADF's Performance Framework to ensure care-related responsibilities and needs are recognised when considering performance progression.

13. Transform transition employment architecture for women veterans

- Fund programs for women veterans to support economic independence, build confidence and employability, address barriers to workforce participation, and strengthen long-term wellbeing and financial security.
- Encourage gender-responsive approaches to women's employment through expanded partnerships and a dedicated women veterans' stream in the Veterans' Employment Program and Prime Minister's Veterans Employment Awards.
- Embed a gender-specific information pack into the existing transition briefings delivered by Defence and DVA, outlining common claim pathways, health entitlements and support options relevant to women veterans.
- Ensure transition seminars include tailored advice and referrals for women veterans in all presentations and materials.

14. Build long-term financial security for women veterans

- Undertake research exploring economic impacts of ADF service and separation on women veterans to inform future supports and improve women veterans' economic security.
- Deliver targeted financial planning workshops for women veterans to support management of superannuation recovery, aged care access, and estate planning.
- Support better financial products and services that address specific economic circumstances facing older women veterans.





Focus area 5:

Recognise care and rebalance the load



Care is essential work. It sustains families, communities and the nation. Women veterans are more likely than their male counterparts to undertake primary caregiving responsibilities, often alongside military service or during transition. Yet service and support systems have not always recognised or responded to the impact of these responsibilities. Without deliberate action, caring responsibilities can affect career progression, economic security, workforce participation and long-term wellbeing.

This focus area recognises that supporting carers is essential to building a modern, inclusive and sustainable Defence and veteran system. The actions that follow seek to improve access to flexibility, childcare and family-inclusive supports, while ensuring that caregiving responsibilities do not create unnecessary barriers to service, employment or career advancement.

Recognising and supporting care benefits individuals, families and the broader workforce. By helping to rebalance the impacts of unpaid care, this focus area will support greater participation, retention and economic security, while contributing to more equitable outcomes for women veterans and their families.

Focus area 5 actions:

15. Remove systemic barriers associated with caregiving

- Improve access to parental leave and flexible working arrangements for men in the ADF.
 - Conduct regular surveys of ADF personnel to improve access to childcare and care-related pressures and inform planning, investment and workforce policies, to gain clarity on childcare needs.
 - ADF career management consider the provision of 12-month lead times for postings and offer longer tenure as an option in regional and remote locations wherever operationally possible, allowing for education continuity and care stability.
 - Consider equal parental leave entitlements for all ADF personnel, including leave for non-birthing parents.
 - Support ADF members and their partners with shared parenting and care roles, through the distribution of resources and information to support dual-career and dual-serving households.
 - Review eligibility and access to informal care supports, including home rehabilitation, transport subsidies, medical accompaniment and carer upskilling.
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16. Embed care-informed transition supports

- Review DVA service delivery and transition arrangements to remove barriers to access, including through childcare and other practical supports that enable participation in services.
- Embed family-inclusive transition planning, including support for those managing ongoing care responsibilities and navigating dual-career households.



Focus area 6:

*Build gender-smart systems
and integrated services*

Strong outcomes for women veterans depend on systems that are connected, evidence-informed, responsive to lived experience and accountable for results. Fragmented services, gaps in data and policies that do not adequately consider gender have, at times, limited the effectiveness of support and made it more difficult to identify where reform is needed most.

This focus area underpins the entire Strategy. The actions that follow focus on building more connected and gender-responsive systems across Defence, DVA and partner organisations by strengthening data, coordination, governance and accountability. They aim to improve how services are designed, delivered and evaluated, ensuring that the needs and experiences of women veterans are consistently considered.

By embedding gender-responsive approaches at a system level, the Strategy will help ensure that progress is evidence-based, outcomes are measurable, and reform delivers lasting benefits for women veterans and their families. Through improved collaboration and integration, this focus area will support a more effective, inclusive and sustainable veteran support system for the future.



Focus area 6 actions:

17. Strengthen gender data, research and transparency

- Progress the National Veterans' Data Asset (NVDA) and require all relevant Commonwealth departments and agencies to collect, improve national data collection, disaggregation and reporting of veteran data by sex and service history, enabling a whole-of-government view of women veterans' experiences.
 - Integrate the perspectives of women veterans into the *Veteran and Family – Learning and Innovation Network (VF-LINK)*, and by using the NVDA and targeted data collection, identify and address the distinct needs of women veterans facing compounding risk factors (e.g. mental ill health, one parent households, disability, family violence, housing insecurity, transitioning from service or long-term unemployment).
 - In accordance with Recommendation 24 of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide, annually publish anonymised data on the administrative and disciplinary outcomes of all incidents and forms of sexual violence, disaggregated by service and including demographic information of victims and perpetrators.
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18. Improve whole-of-government coordination and service integration

- Undertake analysis to consider why women veterans leave the ADF and identify points of attrition, exclusion or unmet need.
 - Review frontline DVA touchpoints (digital, claim forms, letters, transition materials etc.), and implement changes as needed to improve clarity, tone and accessibility for women veterans and families.
 - Improve women-specific referral pathways through Veterans' and Families' Hubs to ensure women are connected to appropriate supports when they need them.
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19. Embed gender accountability across governance and performance frameworks

- With the introduction of the NVDA, ensure reporting and system coordination better reflects the lived experiences of women veterans.
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20. Embed gender capability and lived experience expertise across Defence and DVA systems

- Establish an internal DVA Women Veteran Reform Committee to support evidence-based consideration of gender impacts in decision-making and service delivery.
- DVA and Services Australia to jointly map women veterans' journeys across government services to identify barriers, service gaps and opportunities for improved coordination.
- Rollout gender analysis training for DVA staff to support better gender responsive policy development across DVA.
- Undertake a gender analysis of DVA grant processes and progressively embed gender-responsive improvements to strengthen consideration of women veterans' needs in grant design, delivery and outcomes.

Implementation

DVA and Defence will oversee the implementation of this Strategy through existing governance arrangements, including the Women Veterans Policy Forum, embedded gender expertise and reporting to the Minister.

Implementation will be informed by available evidence, stakeholder engagement, and will be periodically reviewed to ensure the Strategy remains relevant to the needs of women veterans. The Strategy aligns with existing Defence and DVA reporting and accountability mechanisms, including the Women in the ADF Report and engagement with the Repatriation Commission.

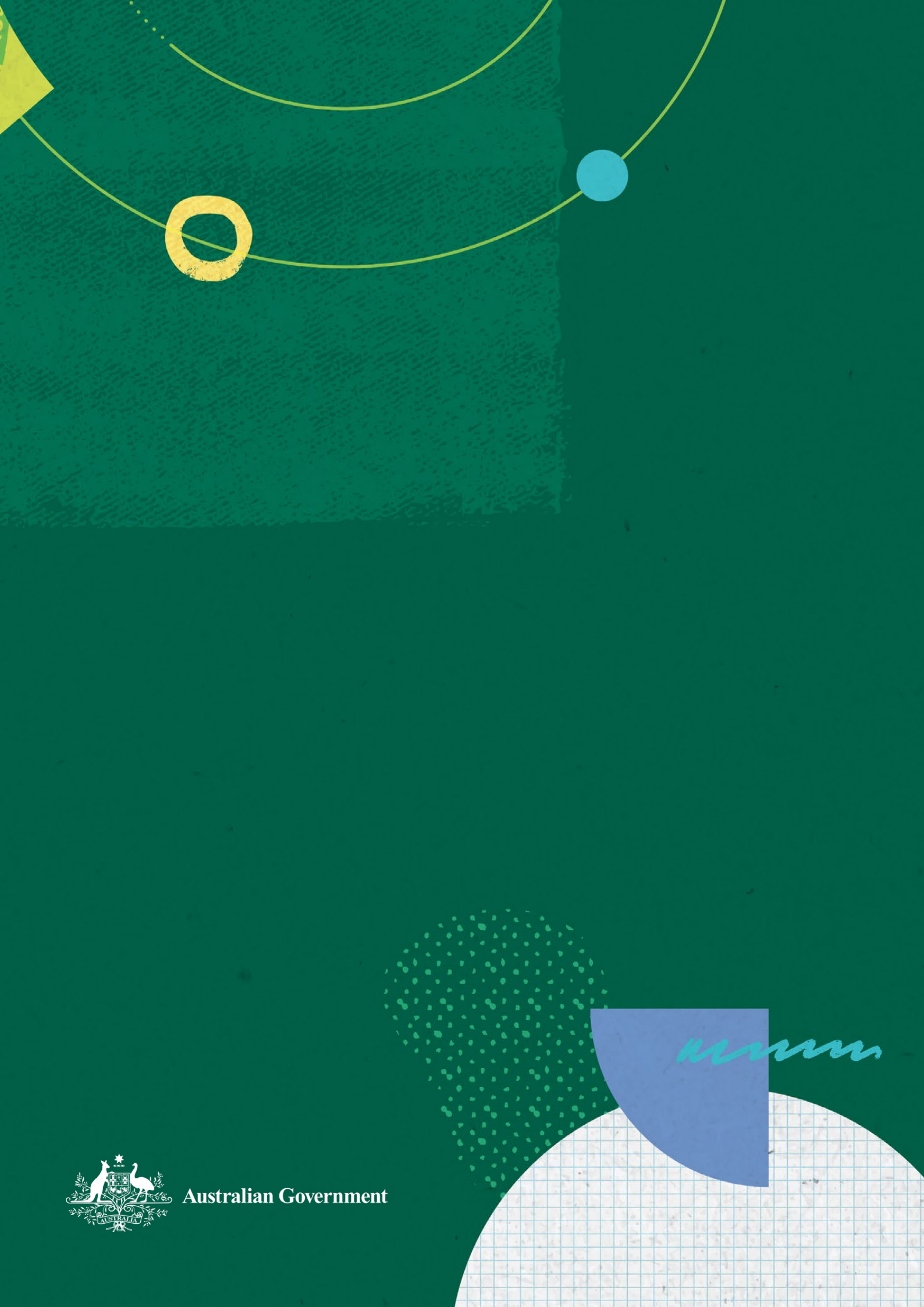


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