Australian Gulf War Veterans’ Follow Up Health Study

The Australian Gulf War Veterans’ Follow Up Health Study 2015 (Follow Up Study) conducted from 2011-2012, compares the physical, psychological and social health and military related exposures of Australian Defence Force (ADF) veterans of the 1990-1991 Gulf War against a military comparison group and the Australian Gulf War Veterans’ Health Study 2003.

The 2003 study sample was drawn from the Australian Gulf War Nominal Roll consisting of 1,871 Navy, Army and Air Force personnel. All participants from the 2003 study were eligible to participate in the current study.

The participation rate for the Follow Up Study was 50 per cent. This high response rate ensured that the response data was comprehensive and representative. Ninety-eight per cent of respondents were male with an average age of fifty years.

An advisory committee involving a number of service and ex-service organisations represented the veteran community during the study.

At follow up, Gulf War veterans were found to be resilient and were likely to have accessed disability and health services in the 12 months prior to the study.

At follow up there was a reduction in smoking, with one half of those who reported being a smoker in the 2003 study no longer smoking at follow up.

The study found that at follow up Gulf War veteran participants were more likely than the comparison group to suffer from a number of conditions, including posttraumatic stress disorder, alcohol disorder, chronic fatigue, irritable bowel syndrome and chronic multisymptom illness.

At follow up there were no statistically significant differences in cancer and mortality rates between Gulf War veterans and the comparison group.

The findings support the work already being undertaken by the Department of Veterans’ Affairs (DVA) to improve access to services, streamline the compensation claims process and expand access to mental health treatment.

Support

DVA may be able to pay for treatment for a number of mental health conditions. This is whether or not the condition is caused by military service. Rehabilitation and compensation is currently available for eligible Gulf War veterans experiencing conditions related to their military service.

Gulf War veterans and their families can access assistance through the Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service (VVCS). VVCS provides free and confidential, nation-wide counselling and support for war and service-related mental health and wellbeing conditions.

For help, to learn more or to check eligibility call 1800 011 046 (24/7) or visit www.vvcs.gov.au. Further support tools and information is available through http://at-ease.dva.gov.au

The Australian Gulf War Veterans’ Follow Up Health Study is available on the DVA website at www.dva.gov.au