



Australian Government

INDEPENDENT STUDY INTO SUICIDE IN THE EX-SERVICE COMMUNITY

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Background

1. An election Commitment in Labor's Plan for Veterans' Affairs is to conduct an independent study into suicide in the ex-service community.

Purpose of the Study

2. The suicide study will examine the broad issues of suicide in the ex-service community, and a number of specific cases of suicide in the last three years, to help identify:
 - ex-service members who are at increased risk of self-harm;
 - common contributing factors among ex-service members who have committed or attempted suicide;
 - the extent of suicide in the ex-service community;
 - lifestyle or other factors that may be contributing to suicide in the ex-service community; and
 - recommended administrative reforms or initiatives to help combat suicide in the ex-service community.

Structure of the Study

3. An eminent person will be appointed to conduct the study. That person will be supported by a secretariat from the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) and will have the capacity to draw on appropriate experts as required.

Timing

4. It is expected that a report on the study will be provided to the Minister for Veterans' Affairs in December 2008.

Issues for Consideration

5. The study should be cognisant of a number of election commitments already identified by the Government to address mental health issues. These include (but are not limited to):
 - (a) The ADF mental health 'Lifecycle' package;
 - (b) Applied Suicide Intervention and Skills Training (ASIST) program; and
 - (c) Make community mental health care ex-service friendly.

6. The study should take into account the work from the Inter-Departmental Working Group looking at rationalising the administrative burden for veterans dealing with multiple agencies and the transitional arrangements.
7. The study should draw on investigations into individual suicides, including Boards/Commissions of Inquiry (for example the recent Gregg Review), to examine the recommendations, the subsequent responses and action taken.
8. The study should draw on other reviews that have occurred or are occurring relevant to suicide or at risk behaviours in the ex-service community. These include (but are not limited to):
 - (a) Relevant research such as the "*Preventing suicide: a psychological autopsy study of the last contact with a health professional before suicide*" that is currently being undertaken by Griffith university; and
 - (b) The imminent Australian Institute of Health and Welfare investigation into the cause of death of DVA clients by age/sex/conflict with a specific focus on suicide.
9. The Study should also consider any relevant information that is made available to the concurrent Review of Mental Health Care in the Australian Defence Force (ADF) and Transition through Discharge.

Terms of Reference

10. The specific tasks of the study are to:
 - (a) Review recent cases of suicide, including those previously identified by the National Veterans' Mental Health and Wellbeing Forum;
 - (b) Draw on current national and international research and literature reviews to identify common contributing factors among ex-service members who have committed or attempted suicide;
 - (c) Identify lifestyle or other factors that may be contributing to suicide in the ex-service community;
 - (d) Identify indicators that could help identify ex-service members who are at an increased risk of self harm;
 - (e) Having regard to the Review of Mental Health Care in the ADF and Transition through Discharge, help address suicide in the ex-service community, including highlighting changes to current policies, procedures and practices that exist in DVA that would minimise potential stress
 - (f) Estimate the extent of suicide in the ex-service community, compared to the general community; and
 - (g) Prepare a final report to the Minister of Veterans' Affairs by December 2008 with appropriate findings and recommendations.

Governance Board

11. A governance board will be set up to oversight the study and provide advice to the Department on the progress of the study.