



**Australian Government**  
**Department of Veterans' Affairs**

**Senate Inquiry into Suicide by Veterans and Ex-service Personnel (2017) Recommendations**  
**Progress of Implementation as at 31 December 2018**

No	Recommendation	Actions in response to the recommendation
1	<p>The committee recommends, that in the context of recent Australian Institute of Health and Welfare findings concerning veterans at risk of suicide, the Australian Government:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• develop and implement specific suicide prevention programs targeted at those veterans identified in at risk groups; and</li><li>• expand the DVA Reconnects Project to proactively contact veterans in these identified in at risk groups.</li></ul>	<p>The two new suicide prevention pilots announced in the 2017-18 Budget are underway.</p> <p>The Mental Health Clinical Management Pilot, known as the Veterans Suicide Prevention Pilot, is currently underway. This initiative forms part of a \$9.8 million budget allocation and is a suicide prevention initiative to support vulnerable veterans discharging from hospital with complex mental and social health needs. <i>beyondblue</i> has been engaged as the service provider to deliver the pilot and is working with the Department to develop the service model. Service delivery commenced in July 2018 in metropolitan Brisbane across the private and public hospital sectors. Phoenix Australia has been engaged to provide an independent evaluation of the Veterans Suicide Prevention Pilot.</p> <p>The Coordinated Veterans' Care (CVC) Mental Health Pilot will expand on the broader CVC program to test a new model of care for veterans with mild to moderate anxiety or depression. The Pilot uses a team-based model of care led by a general practitioner (GP) and supported by a practice nurse whilst the veteran accesses a six to eight week app-based intervention, to provide improved clinical management with planning and care coordination. The pilot is being rolled out in a staged approach.</p> <p>Furthermore, the Townsville Community Engagement Pilot has been implemented to evaluate whether the establishment of a Care Coordination team within the region, comprising an Open Arms clinician and two lived experience peers, enhanced the clinical care service offer to vulnerable, including at risk of suicide, clients. The two year pilot is almost complete. It was delivered in four phases, focusing on strengthening relationships with the community, building more effective transitions from hospital to community care, enhancing the provision of 24 hour care and undertaking an evaluation in preparation for national implementation. A focus of the pilot was to more fully engage and support complex and/or high risk clients in the region; in particular, clients considered to be at risk of suicide. Learnings from this Pilot will seek to enhance Open Arms' ability to support clients to access a more holistic model of care that promotes recovery than was previously available. An evaluation of the Townsville Community Engagement</p>

No	Recommendation	Actions in response to the recommendation
	(Continued...)	<p>Pilot was undertaken in September – October 2018. The final report has been submitted with the project expected to be finalised soon.</p> <p>Following finalisation of the Townsville Community Engagement Pilot, Open Arms will undertake a national rollout of the Community Engagement program, which includes a component of Peer Support. A National Peer Officer position will be established to implement recommendations from the evaluation, and coordinate and provide support to the Peers in the regions.</p> <p>Non-liability health care (NLHC) for all mental health conditions is available to current and former full time members of the Australian Defence Force, including reservists with continuous full-time service. The 2018-19 Budget provided funding for reservists with border protection service, disaster relief service or who have been involved in a serious training accident to also access NLHC for any mental health condition, from 1 July 2018.</p> <p>DVA has commissioned Phoenix Australia, through its contract arrangement, to conduct a Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) in relation to suicide programs and interventions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Phoenix Australia will undertake a narrative review of the literature to provide DVA with a comprehensive understanding of the area of suicide prevention strategies/interventions.</li> <li>• The narrative review on suicide prevention will aim to map out and describe in general the types of suicide prevention strategies and/or interventions that can be employed. These may range from broad population level public health initiatives, through to specific very targeted interventions for particular populations that are known to be at risk (for example, those who have made a suicide attempt).</li> <li>• The REA will provide DVA with an understanding of the strength of the evidence particular interventions/strategies.</li> <li>• It will also provide DVA with a continuum of different suicide prevention strategies which can be used to identify where there may be gaps or overlaps in suicide prevention strategies being trialled with this population and being proposed for trial with this population.</li> </ul> <p>The REA is expected to be finalised in March 2019.</p>

2	<p>The committee recommends that the Australian Government commission an independent study into the mental health impacts of compensation claim assessment processes on veterans engaging with the Department of Veterans' Affairs and the Commonwealth Superannuation Corporation. The results of this research should be utilised to improve compensation claim processes.</p>	<p>DVA has engaged a leading academic to undertake an independent study into the mental health impacts of compensation claim assessment process on veterans. The final report of the study is to be delivered by the end of February 2019.</p> <p>An external researcher has completed a desk-top study and literature review, which is providing an evidence base for the independent study.</p> <p>As part of DVA's Transformation, DVA has met with over two thousand veterans and their families who have had experience in dealing with DVA, to learn from them. These lessons learnt have influenced both the scope and process of the review.</p>
3	<p>The committee recommends that the Australian Government establish a National Veteran Suicide Register to be maintained by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW).</p>	<p>National suicide monitoring of serving and ex-serving ADF personnel is annually updated by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). Defence and DVA are assisting with collection of data. The AIHW released the 2018 update on 21 September 2018. The web report includes deaths from 1 January 2001 up to 31 December 2016, and updates the total count of suicide deaths, the comparison rate to the Australian population and trend analysis for ex-serving men aged 18-29.</p>
4	<p>The committee recommends that the Australian Government review the enhancement of veteran-specific online training programs intended for mental health professionals. In particular:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• requirements for providers to undertake training; and</li> <li>• the introduction of incentives for undertaking online training and demonstrating outcomes in clinical practice.</li> </ul>	<p>An external consultancy was engaged to undertake this review. This included a review of veteran-specific online provider training programs, in particular the requirements and incentives to undertake online training. The final report has been delivered and is being considered by DVA.</p>
5	<p>The committee recommends that the Department of Defence and the Department of Veterans' Affairs align arrangements for the provision of professional mental health care.</p>	<p>The Department implemented the White Card on Transition Project in mid-2018. This ensures the issue of a White Card to all separating members with at least one day of continuous full time service to enable them to more easily access treatment for any mental health condition. DVA is now aware of all service personnel enlisting, as well as those transitioning out of service, allowing for the issue of White Cards to all transitioning members.</p> <p>The Department was part of a Defence-led pilot trialling the Transition Health Assessment (THA) process, which commenced on 3 October 2017. The THA Evaluation Report is currently being considered by</p>

	(Continued...)	<p>Defence. The evaluation will determine the effectiveness and scalability of the pilot to other key Defence health facilities across Australia. This pilot tested collaboration between DVA, Defence and the Commonwealth Superannuation Corporation (CSC) to ensure members including those suffering from mental health conditions have certainty in relation to the care that they will receive once they separate from the military. Additionally, this process ensures they are informed as to the benefits that they will receive after they have separated.</p> <p>The Special Operations Forces Pilot was conducted at Holsworthy Barracks between January and November 2018 to support members through the transition process, noting the increased complexity of claims for this veteran group. The Pilot tested a client-focused, tailored model that aimed to provide a seamless, end-to-end experience for ADF members and their families when they transitioned out of the ADF. The Pilot depended on direct close support from the ADF Chain-of- Command. Although the Pilot has concluded, the service provided by the Pilot at Holsworthy continues until 30 June 2019 while evaluation and next steps are considered.</p> <p>The Next Generation Health Service Project incorporates the procurement of the next ADF Health Services supply arrangements and the next Service Level Agreement between single-Services and Joint Health Command. DVA has been a key stakeholder in the project as a member of the Project Steering Group and Integrated Project Team and has contributed significantly through the provision of specialist advice to support the project. This is an ongoing collaboration journey between DVA and Defence in relation to service provision that will continue over many years.</p>
6	<p>The committee recommends that the Australian Government make a reference to the Productivity Commission to simplify the legislative framework of compensation and rehabilitation for service members and veterans. In particular, this review should examine the utilisation of Statements of Principle in the determination of compensation claims. The report of this systemic review should be completed within 18 months and tabled in the Parliament.</p>	<p>The Productivity Commission Inquiry into Compensation and Rehabilitation for Veterans is well advanced.</p> <p>The Productivity Commission released a draft report titled <i>A Better Way to Support Veterans</i>, on 14 December 2018. The draft report, containing 48 draft recommendations, 20 draft findings and 17 calls for further information, proposes a substantial and broad program of reform. None of the draft recommendations have been accepted or rejected by the Government at this stage. Public hearings will be held by the Commission in February 2019 in response to the draft report. The Commission has called for submissions by 11 February 2019.</p> <p>The final report of the inquiry is expected to be submitted to Government by late June 2019.</p>
7	<p>The committee recommends that the Australian Government continue to support the 'Veteran Centric Reform' program within the Department of Veterans' Affairs.</p>	<p>\$166.6 million was provided in 2017-2018 budget to support commencement of the Veteran Centric Reform (VCR) Program. The Government has committed a further \$111.9 million in the 2018-19 Budget. Further funding to continue the transformation program is a matter for Government decision.</p>

8	<p>The committee recommends that, while the Veteran Centric Reform program is being implemented, the Australian Government continue to fund measures to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• alleviate pressure on claims processing staff and to reduce the backlog of claims; and</li> <li>• increase case coordination staff to assist clients with complex needs</li> </ul> <p>(Continued...)</p>	<p>The Department’s web application MyService supports clients’ ability to lodge a number of their claims online. MyService is now open to all current and former members of the Australian Defence Force, irrespective of when and where they served. As at 7 January 2019, there were more than 46,300 MyService users and more than 16,600 claims had been submitted through MyService.</p> <p>In addition, the Department has streamlined claims processing for 40 medical conditions, which now have a reduced or removed investigation process. Under these <i>Decision Ready</i> arrangements, some claims are being determined immediately on submission. By 7 January 2019, over 1300 claims have been approved this way. Further research and system changes are underway to expand the number and range of conditions that can be streamlined or have an immediate decision made. Furthermore, from late January 2019 MyService will be expanded to allow incapacity payment claims to be lodged online.</p> <p>Additional resources to assist with claims processing and reducing the backlog were obtained following the \$13.5 million budget allocation in 2017-2018 budget. The Department’s improved processes and systems have significantly reduced the time taken to process claims. Timeliness targets for processing all compensation and income support claims were all achieved in 2017-18.</p> <p>Further to this a two-year, a \$4 million case management pilot called the Wellbeing and Support Program has commenced to provide support to veterans with complex needs transitioning from the Australian Defence Force (ADF), and to former members who are experiencing crisis. The Program is anticipated to include up to 100 veterans in the first year, increasing to 200 veterans in the second year. A dedicated case manager with a team of medical professionals will support the veteran and their family for up to 24 months.</p>
9	<p>The committee recommends that the Department of Veterans' Affairs conduct a review of its training program to ensure relevant staff:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• have an understanding of the realities of military service;</li> <li>• have an understanding of health issues of veterans;</li> <li>• have appropriate communication skills to engage with clients with mental health conditions; and</li> <li>• have sufficient training to interpret medical assessment and reports.</li> </ul>	<p>DVA has a strong focus on educating staff about ADF service. DVA learning programs that focus on the realities of military service, the health issues of veterans and communication skills include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>It’s Why We’re Here:</b> the one and a half day national client service training program covers building client-focused relationships and improving communication and cooperation across DVA. Contemporary veterans or former serving members form a panel and speak to participants to help build understanding of the implications that military service has on people’s lives.</li> <li>• <b>Serve – Client Service Induction</b> is for all new starters to learn about the evolution of the DVA portfolio, the different client cohorts, the changed attitudes to and increasing importance of mental health, the variety of services and products available to clients and also to practice some client service skills.</li> <li>• <b>Managing Challenging Behaviours:</b> an eight module elearning course on the effects of military training and service on veterans’ physical and mental health.</li> </ul>

	<p>(Continued...)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Managing Sensitive Conversations:</b> a one day workshop that assists staff to effectively manage sensitive conversations, assessments and other communications with clients reporting allegations of sexual abuse; and to self-support and provide emotional support to others.</li> <li>• <b>Better understanding the implications of physical and sexual abuse in the military:</b> a one day workshop on understanding sexual and physical abuse (including the impact of burnout and vicarious trauma), and what is known about the cycle of abuse.</li> </ul> <p>An external consultancy has conducted the review into DVA’s client service training programs in order to improve the quality of its client services. Findings were that core DVA client service programs are of a high quality but DVA could consider adopting a more programmed approach and better linkages to related processes such as mentoring, coaching and performance management.</p> <p>The recommendations were clustered into four themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recommendation 1: Align DVA Learning &amp; Development programs with the DVA career lifecycle</li> <li>• Recommendation 2: Develop a robust induction program for ‘Service Delivery’ staff</li> <li>• Recommendation 3: Foster learning transfer and behaviour change</li> <li>• Recommendation 4: Use a data informed approach</li> </ul> <p>DVA is now preparing to implement the recommendations from the review.</p>
10	<p>The committee recommends that the Department of Veterans' Affairs review its use of medico-legal firms in relation to the assessment of the conditions of veterans. In particular, this review should confirm:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• assessments undertaken are appropriate to the conditions considered;</li> <li>• that the medical professionals used have undertaken training on treating veterans and can demonstrate their expertise working amongst this client group; and</li> <li>• the need for independent medical assessments where information is already available from the veteran's own doctor or treating specialist.</li> </ul>	<p>As part of the DVA Transformation Program, an internal review of the issues associated with the collection of medical evidence was undertaken and completed in November 2018. Options to streamline the processes associated with accessing specialist medical advice, and to improve the service experience when dealing with medico-legal firms, are being considered with improvements expected from 2019-20.</p>

11	<p>The committee recommends the Department of Veterans' Affairs expand its online engagement with younger veterans through social media to raise awareness regarding available support services.</p>	<p>DVA has implemented a web-based information tool providing links to support services for veterans and families in need. This website has been developed with reference to Defence Engage and other community supports, and is available through the front page of the DVA Website and on the DVA Intranet for staff to use in providing support and assistance to veterans.</p> <p>DVA engages with the serving and ex-service community via Facebook regularly, on a broad range of issues. DVA's social media presence enables the sharing of information with the wider veteran community, and the opportunity to respond to questions and comments raised by individuals.</p>
12	<p>The committee recommends that the reference to the Productivity Commission should also include examination of the following areas in the Veterans' Affairs portfolio:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• governance arrangements;</li> <li>• administrative processes; and</li> <li>• service delivery.</li> </ul>	<p>As per recommendation six, the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Compensation and Rehabilitation for Veterans is underway. The terms of reference encompass examination of DVA's legislative framework, governance arrangements, administrative processes and service delivery.</p> <p>The Productivity Commission released a draft report titled <i>A Better Way to Support Veterans</i>, on 14 December 2018. A number of significant recommendations have been proposed — none of these have been accepted or rejected by the Government at this stage. The proposed reforms include legislative simplification, changes to governance and responsibilities, improving service delivery and supports, data, evidence and transparency. Public hearings will be conducted by the Commission in February 2019 in response to the draft report. The final report of the inquiry is expected to be submitted to Government by late June 2019.</p> <p>DVA reviewed its governance framework in 2017-18 and is implementing a new, fit-for-purpose, more efficient and effective governance framework for the department. The new framework is now operational and is based on the principles of performance assurance and accountability within a risk management framework. The governance bodies have integrated these principles into DVA operations through a strategic, operational and performance focus.</p>
13	<p>The committee recommends that the Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) commence the proposed performance audit of the 'Efficiency of veterans' service delivery by the Department of Veterans' Affairs' as soon as possible.</p>	<p>The ANAO audit of <i>The efficiency of veterans' service delivery by the Department of Veterans' Affairs</i> has been completed. The final report was tabled on 27 June 2018, and included six recommendations relating to the management, quality and timeliness of veterans' rehabilitation and compensation claims processes.</p> <p>Government accepted all of the recommendations and work is underway to address them.</p>

14	<p>The committee recommends that the Transition Taskforce examine and address:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• any gaps in medical services or income support for veterans in transition or immediately following transition;</li> <li>• barriers to employment for veterans who are transitioning such as workers' insurance issues and civilian recognition of qualifications, skills and training; and</li> <li>• disincentives for veterans to undertake work or study resulting from the legislative or policy frameworks of the Department of Veterans' Affairs.</li> </ul>	<p>The Transition Taskforce identified a range of barriers to successful transition, including a member's level of control over the decision to leave military service, their awareness of, and access to, transition information and services, and unpreparedness to manage the differences between the military environment and civilian life, including loss of identity. Many of the issues the Taskforce examined were also identified as part of the Senate Inquiry into Suicide by Veterans and Ex-service Personnel, including service gaps and difficulties in finding employment or undertaking study.</p> <p>In May 2018, the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade's Inquiry into transition from the Australian Defence Force (ADF) was announced with a call for submissions. The Departments of Defence and Veterans' Affairs made a joint submission to the Inquiry. At 17 January 2019, the committee had received 50 written submissions and held five public hearings. DVA and Defence appeared before the Committee on 16 November. The Committee is expected to report in March 2019.</p> <p>While the work of the Taskforce is complete, the findings and recommendations of the Parliamentary Inquiry that is underway, along with the Taskforce's report available on the DVA website, will inform how both Departments can make recommendation to Government to improve the support services available to transitioning members and their families.</p> <p>Further to this, the Veteran Payment has commenced from 1 May 2018. The Veteran Payment will be made available to veterans during the process of making claims related to mental health conditions. This means-tested payment provides an income to veterans and their partners to alleviate financial pressure whilst awaiting claims outcomes. It is available to eligible veterans and dependants with entitlement under the <i>Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2004</i> (MRCA), and will continue up to six weeks after a decision is made in relation to a liability claim.</p> <p>The 2018-19 Budget included measures to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• extend non-liability health care (NLHC) for all mental health conditions to reservists who have provided disaster relief service, border protection service or who have been involved in a serious training accident, which commenced on 1 July 2018;</li> <li>• exempt veterans who are in full time study as part of their rehabilitation plan from the stepdown that occurs to incapacity payments after 45 weeks. The measure ensures that veterans are supported for the duration of their full time study program that is part of their rehabilitation plan and commenced on 1 November 2018;</li> <li>• enhance the Prime Minister's Veterans Employment Program, which aims to increase employment opportunities for veterans by raising awareness of the unique skills and experience that veterans can bring to the civilian workplace. The measure will provide additional assistance to veterans to help them gain employment on leaving the Australian Defence Force; and</li> </ul>
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	(Continued...)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>implement a new framework under the Prime Minister’s Veterans’ Employment Program to allow businesses to publicly declare their support for veterans’ employment, and provide additional support for existing initiatives.</li> </ul> <p>Defence, through the Australian Defence College, continues to improve access to qualifications and training records for transitioning ADF members. Delivery of improved recognition and access to qualifications will assist transitioning and ex-serving ADF members to explain their skills and experience in plain language for civilian employers.</p>
15	<p>The committee recommends that the Department of Veterans' Affairs develop a two-track transition program for serving members leaving the ADF. Those identified as being in 'at risk' groups or requiring additional assistance due to their circumstances should be able to access intensive transition services. These intensive transition services should include additional support for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>claims case management;</li> <li>healthcare, mental health and wellbeing support;</li> <li>employment assistance programs;</li> <li>social connectedness programs; and</li> <li>health and wellbeing programs.</li> </ul>	<p>As per the response to recommendation five, the Special Operations Forces Pilot was conducted at Holsworthy Barracks between January and November 2018 to support members through the transition process, noting the increased complexity of claims for this veteran group. The Pilot tested a client-focused, tailored model that aimed to provide a seamless, end-to-end experience for ADF members and their families when they transitioned out of the ADF. The Pilot depended on direct close support from the ADF chain-of-command. Although the Pilot has concluded, the service provided by the Pilot at Holsworthy continues until 30 June 2019 while evaluation and next steps are considered.</p> <p>As per recommendation eight, a \$4 million case management pilot called the Wellbeing and Support Program has commenced to provide support to veterans with complex needs transitioning from the Australian Defence Force (ADF), and to former members who are experiencing crisis. Examination of case management models from Canada, the United Kingdom, and the Department of Human Services informed a fit-for-purpose case management model. Other expert advice was also obtained on best practice case management. The Program is anticipated to include up to 100 veterans in the first year, increasing to 200 veterans in the second year. A dedicated case manager with a team of medical professionals will support the veteran and their family for up to 24 months.</p> <p>Further to this, \$2.1 million over four years has been committed for the Annual GP Health Assessment for the first five years post-discharge for separating members. This is due for commencement from 1 July 2019.</p> <p>As per recommendation 14, the 2018-19 Budget included four measures that will assist transitioning ADF members.</p> <p>A Parliamentary inquiry into <i>Transition from the ADF</i> is currently underway (also see recommendation 14).</p>
16	<p>The committee recommends the Australian Government issue all ADF members transitioning into civilian life with a DVA White Card.</p>	<p>As per the response to recommendation five, the Department is now issuing a White Card to all separating members with at least one day of continuous full time service.</p> <p>In addition, a Veterans’ Covenant will be implemented in 2019 to make it easier to recognise and respect the contribution of veterans. This will include a new Veterans’ Card and lapel pin to make it easier for</p>

	(Continued...)	businesses, government and community organisations to identify veterans when they are not wearing their uniform or medals, so they can offer discounts and extra support.
17	The committee recommends that the Career Transition Assistance Scheme include an option for veterans to undertake a period of work experience with an outside employer.	Transitioning ADF members can access up to 23 days of Approved Absence under the Defence Career Transition Assistance Scheme, dependent upon eligibility. Approved Absence may be used to undertake work experience with an outside employer under the current scheme. Defence is promoting this benefit as it is currently underutilised by transitioning ADF members. The ADF is undertaking a review of the Career Transition Assistance Scheme to better address the needs of all transitioning ADF members, including risk groups.
18	The committee recommends that the Australian Public Service Commission (APSC) conduct a review into mechanisms to further support veteran employment in the Australian Public Service and the public sector.	<p>The Australian Public Service Commission (APSC) has reviewed its mechanisms to support veterans' employment, which has resulted in several initiatives aimed at increasing the participation of veterans in public sector employment.</p> <p>These include the development of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a website containing information specific to veterans seeking employment in the Australian Public Service (APS);</li> <li>• a guide that aligns Australian Defence Force (ADF) ranks to APS classifications; and</li> <li>• a practical toolkit to guide veterans through the process of applying for an APS job.</li> </ul> <p>Informal feedback has been positive with a particular focus on the webpage video depicting the transition of veterans into public service careers.</p>
19	The committee recommends that the Department of Veterans' Affairs review the support for partners of veterans to identify further avenues for assistance. This review should include services such as information and advice, counselling, peer support and options for family respite care to support partners of veterans.	<p>A literature review of support to families has been completed and a stocktake of services available to veterans' families who are experiencing high family stress, mainstream and veteran specific, is underway to inform ongoing development of family support measures.</p> <p>A budget commitment of \$7.1m over four years provides additional support for MRCA veterans who have rendered warlike service and for the partners of veterans with warlike service who may have died while rendering such service, or whose death was a death by suicide and is related to their service.</p> <p>Veterans, and their nominated family members may access:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Additional child care support</u> for pre and primary school aged children to reduce barriers to a veteran's rehabilitation</li> <li>• <u>Counselling support</u> to enable the family unit to maintain its connections to community, employment and social interaction and manage within its budget. A family can access four counselling services each year for a consecutive five year period while the veteran is participating in a rehabilitation plan. Over the course of a five year rehabilitation plan, a family can access up to 20 counselling sessions.</li> </ul>

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Widowed partners may also be able to access:

- Home help within and around the home to assist the proper functioning or maintenance of the environment of the residence for a two year period from the date of death of the veteran.
- Counselling support to assist widowed partners in managing challenging life circumstances following the death of their partner. Four sessions per year for a two year period following the death of the veteran may be accessed.
- Additional childcare support for pre and primary school aged children to assist widowed partners.

This measure commenced on 1 May 2018.

Open Arms remains committed to consultation with key stakeholders, through forums such as the Veterans' Families Forum at Invictus Games in 2018, and the annual DVA Female Veterans Policy Forum. Ongoing consultation to identify service gaps and how services may be further tailored to better support families of current serving and ex-serving ADF members is occurring and informing service delivery.

The Female Veterans and Veterans' Families Policy Forum (the Forum) provides an opportunity for female veterans and veterans' families to engage with Government and DVA about their needs and experiences and develop ideas and solutions to complex challenges. The reports from the previous Forums are available on the DVA website. The report from the 2018 Forum has been released to participants and interested parties, and will be available on the DVA website in the near future.

On 11-12 September 2018, the 2018 Female Veterans and Veterans' Families Policy Forum was held in Canberra, and was attended by 48 participants from the female veterans and veterans' families communities. Work is underway to progress the implementation of a number of ideas generated by female veterans and veteran family members at the Forum.

In addition to the Forum itself, members have also participated in additional workshops. In July 2017, Forum representatives participated in a Veterans' Families and Transition workshop. A Female Veterans and Veterans' Families Recall Workshop was held on 5-6 June 2018, to progress outcomes from the 2017 Forum. The 2019 Forum is expected to be held on 13 and 14 August 2019.

On 14 December 2018 the Minister for Veterans' Affairs, the Hon Darren Chester MP, announced the establishment of a Council for Women and Families United by Defence Service. The purpose of the Council is to advise the Minister for Veterans' Affairs and the Government on high level complex strategic matters relating to women and families impacted by defence service. DVA is consulting with the veteran community regarding the operational arrangements for the Council in early 2019.

20	<p>The committee recommends:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the Australian Government expand the Veterans and Community Grants program to support the provision of alternative therapies to veterans with mental health conditions; and</li> <li>• the Department of Veterans' Affairs consult with ex-service organisations and the veteran community regarding avenues to reform the Veterans and Community Grants program to support the provision of alternative therapies to veterans.</li> </ul>	<p>A lead reviewer has been identified for the review and a desk-top analysis of information is being undertaken.</p>
21	<p>The committee recommends the Australian Government fund a trial program that would provide assistance animals for veterans with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) stemming from their military service in order to gather research to support the eventual funding of animals for veterans with PTSD and/or other mental health conditions through the Department of Veterans' Affairs.</p>	<p>On 30 May 2018, the Minister for Veterans' Affairs announced that La Trobe University in Victoria will partner with DVA in conducting a \$2 million trial of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) assistance dogs for veterans. Work has commenced on the detailed design phase of the trial, including the process for veteran recruitment. Selection of participants will commence early in 2019. Following the matching and suitability process, there will be a period of approximately 18 months for the initial dog training and the bonding process, prior to the placement of the dog with the participant on a permanent basis. It is expected that up to 20 participants will take part in the trial.</p>
22	<p>The committee recommends that the Australian Government provide funding to support the Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• create and maintain a public database of services available to veterans; and</li> <li>• provide an information service to assist veterans and families connect and access appropriate services provided by ex-service organisations and others.</li> </ul>	<p>DVA has implemented a web-based information tool providing links to support services for veterans and families in need. This website has been developed with reference to Defence Engage and other community supports, and is available through the front page of the DVA Website and on the DVA Intranet for use of staff in providing support and assistance to veterans.</p> <p>A community engagement pilot is underway in Townsville (see recommendation 1). As part of this DVA is working towards an online peer network to connect community and professional resources. A Community Coordination Team has been established and is working with the local community. The Defence Engage website is now accessible through the Open Arms website.</p>

23	<p>The committee recommends that the Australian Government establish a Bureau of Veterans' Advocates to represent veterans, commission legal representation where required, train advocates for veterans and be responsible for advocate insurance issues.</p>	<p>Some \$1.7 million has been committed to a scoping study on veterans' advocacy and support services. Terms of reference have been approved, and the study is well advanced. The study was led by Mr Robert Cornall AO.</p> <p>Mr Cornall's discussion paper was released on 31 May 2018 and the study received a total of 227 submissions from veterans, veterans' families, current advocates, and ex-service organisations. Consultation meetings took place in all capital cities and in regional centres between June and September 2018.</p> <p>The study sought the views of relevant policy and other stakeholders in Australia, including the Veterans' Review Board, the Administrative Appeals Tribunal, and representatives from the legal, community, health and disability sectors. The study also considered comparable overseas advocacy services for veterans.</p> <p>The Report has been completed by Mr Cornall and provided to the Department and Productivity Commission to support their future deliberation. The Report will be considered alongside the draft recommendations of the Productivity Commission.</p>
24	<p>The committee recommends that the Australian Government establish an independent review of the representation of veterans before the Veterans' Review Board (VRB). This review should assess whether the rights of vulnerable veterans are being adequately protected and whether further support mechanisms for veterans appearing before the Veterans' Review Board are required.</p>	<p>A review of representation of veterans before the VRB was considered as a part of the scoping study on veterans' advocacy and support services by Mr Robert Cornall AO (as per recommendation 23).</p> <p>The Report has been completed by Mr Cornall and provided to the Department and Productivity Commission to support their future deliberation. The Report will be considered alongside the draft recommendations of the Productivity Commission.</p>