

AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE NATIONAL MENTAL HEALTH COMMISSION REVIEW INTO THE SUICIDE AND SELF HARM PREVENTION SERVICES AVAILABLE TO CURRENT AND FORMER SERVING ADF MEMBERS AND THEIR FAMILIES



Australian Government

KEY MESSAGES

The Australian Government is transforming the way mental health care is delivered in Australia with significant investment and many initiatives to support suicide prevention and improve mental health across all populations.

SUICIDE PREVENTION

The Government's approach to suicide prevention focuses on increasing awareness of suicide prevention in the serving and ex-serving community, increasing access to mental health treatment, providing resources and information to support families and individuals, and increasing understanding of the incidence and risk factors for suicide in the ex-service community.

Protective factors appear to be in place during a person's military career that reduce the risk of suicide while serving. It is possible that once these protective factors are removed after transition, some former serving members become more vulnerable.

It is essential that current and former Australian Defence Force (ADF) members have access to the right kind of mental health support at the right time. An extensive service system exists to support mental health and wellbeing. Help is available, and help can make a difference.

Unique stressors are associated with military life and there are a range of programs implemented by the Department of Defence (Defence) aimed at building resilience, improving awareness of suicide prevention, addressing stigma and encouraging help-seeking as early as possible.

The Government is continuing to build on the foundation established by the Department of Veterans' Affairs' (DVA) Operation *Life* suicide prevention and awareness strategy, to strengthen suicide prevention efforts within the serving and ex-serving community. The mental health and suicide prevention initiatives announced in last year's and this year's Budget will strengthen these efforts and demonstrate a holistic and integrated approach.

Review, evaluation and continuous improvement are vital and will continue to be undertaken by DVA and Defence to ensure that services and supports meet the needs of individuals and families. Effective use of data and research will ensure that programs are evidence based and represent best-practice.

The Government's investment in initiatives within the defence and veteran communities provides an opportunity to develop a better understanding of suicide prevention within similar community populations, such as police and first responders.

Defence has extended development of the next Defence Mental Health & Wellbeing Strategy to ensure it is informed by the outcomes of the Commission's Review, the current Senate Inquiry into Suicide and the Government's Fifth National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Plan.

SEAMLESS TRANSITION

Successful transition from the ADF is best supported by DVA and the member establishing a relationship as early as practical. Early engagement initiatives will allow DVA to reach out to ADF members at critical times to offer support and remind them of DVA services available pre and post-separation.

The Transition Taskforce is examining the experiences of ADF members and their families as they re-enter civilian life with a view to a reformed process being implemented.

Securing appropriate employment after transitioning from the ADF is essential for many and a number of Government initiatives will improve employment opportunities for transitioning members.

VETERAN CENTRIC REFORM

The Government recognises that serving and ex-serving members and their families are in need of urgent reform of DVA services and support. \$166.6 million was provided in the 2017-18 Budget to implement the first stage of Veteran Centric Reform to deliver better support and services for veterans, underpinned by digital access, streamlined processes and modern technology.

AFTER ADF SERVICE

The Government has improved access to mental health treatment by providing \$46.4 million in last year's Budget to extend and streamline eligibility for non-liability health care to anyone who has ever served one day in the full-time ADF. A further \$33.5 million was provided this year to expand non-liability health care to cover all mental health conditions.

Two important suicide prevention initiatives have been funded with \$9.8 million to pilot new approaches to supporting vulnerable veterans experiencing mental health concerns. These pilots will target two different cohorts of former ADF members – those with severe and complex mental health needs discharging from hospital and those with chronic, but stable, mental and physical health issues. These initiatives are in addition to the \$191 million DVA spends annually on providing mental health support to current and former ADF members.

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT

Families make a significant contribution to the health and wellbeing of ADF members in-service and post-service. Recognising this, the Veterans & Veterans Families Counselling Service (VWCS) has a family inclusive approach that enables therapeutic interventions to address the broader mental health impacts on the family and support positive family functioning.

Co-design with both ADF members and their families will continue to be a priority in the development of new Defence, DVA and VWCS programs and initiatives.

DATA LINKAGE AND RESEARCH

While there is an extensive system of support available, barriers still exist that stop people from accessing this care. Understanding what stops people from seeking help and putting in place strategies to improve pathways to care is a priority.

The Government will continue to build its evidence base by undertaking research and improving data collection processes. Recent research on suicide, homelessness, transition and families will support the design of mental health and rehabilitation services specifically to meet the needs of current and former ADF members and their families.

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A SNAPSHOT OF THE IMMEDIATE RESPONSE

OVERVIEW

The Australian Government is transforming the way mental health care is delivered in Australia with significant investment and many initiatives to support suicide prevention and improve mental health across all populations

SUICIDE PREVENTION

\$9.8 million for two new suicide prevention pilot initiatives targeting veterans with severe and complex mental health needs discharging from hospital and with chronic mental and physical health issues

A network of 12 Suicide Prevention Trials, totalling \$36 million in funding, to provide evidence of how a systems-based approach can be undertaken at a regional level, including a trial focussed on the ex-service community in Townsville

The Synergy Project, a \$30 million research and capacity building project, trialling customised IT solutions for mental health service providers seeking to better help clients through IT based service improvement. A key element of Synergy is to incorporate at least two trials for the veteran community

\$2.5 million over two years to Lifeline Australia to support the trial of a new crisis text service, Text4Good, for all Australians in need

The Defence Suicide Prevention Program will be one of the first mental health programs to undergo evaluation as part of the Continuous Improvement Framework (CIF) that will be implemented as part of the next Defence Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT - CURRENT SERVING

Engaging additional permanent specialist mental health ADF personnel

Comprehensive mental health training will be delivered to all frontline Defence Community Organisation staff

Improving support to specialist services and the ADF mental health workforce through expansion of the role of the ADF Centre for Mental Health

Implementing mental health awareness and skills training programs and development of options for a peer support worker model

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT - TRANSITION

\$6.9 million to provide incapacity payments to support veterans with episodic mental health conditions to continue participating in the workplace

Improvement of the Career Transition Assistance Scheme (CTAS) to support members who are separating from the ADF

A Single Medical Assessment Process (SMAP) on separation from the ADF, reducing the need for multiple medical assessments where possible and for the member to submit the same information more than once

\$2.7 million for the Prime Minister's Veterans' Employment Program to work with industry to recognise the unique skills and experience of military service

\$4.25 million over 5 years for Younger Veterans Grants to ex-service organisations for a wide range of purposes, including social inclusion and peer support

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT - EX-SERVING

\$33.5 million expansion of non-liability health care to cover all mental health conditions

Youth-specific mental health services for people aged 12-25 years are available to young veterans, ADF personnel and their families across Australia through headspace

CLAIMS PROCESS

\$166.6 million to deliver better support by DVA underpinned by digital access, streamlined processes and modern technology

Developing My Service, an online portal to improve time taken to process claims

Implementing the Early Engagement Model for sharing of information between Defence and DVA to provide better support for current serving and ex-serving personnel

Digitisation of records in both Defence and DVA

DATA & RESEARCH

Research will continue on key issues including prevalence of suicide, homelessness, and families

Analysis of findings from the Transition and Wellbeing Research Programme

A long-term study of the effectiveness of rehabilitation arrangements by DVA and Defence

A mapping exercise of mental and social health services against the stepped care model

Collaboration with State and Territory governments and the Department of Health to expand opportunities to incorporate veteran and ADF status indicators into datasets to better understand service use and, where possible, patient outcomes

The Rapid Exposure Supporting Trauma Recovery (RESTORE) Trial to investigate effectiveness of an intensive delivery of prolonged exposure therapy for treatment of PTSD

Longitudinal ADF Study Evaluating Resilience (LASER) research program to examine personal and environmental factors that contribute to resilience and wellbeing

FAMILY SUPPORT

\$8.5 million to extend eligibility for WVCS services to even more partners and children of ADF members, and to enable access for ex-partners while co-parenting with an ADF member

Defence families can also access a range of family support programs through the Defence Family Helpline including a series of face-to-face workshops to help Defence families build their resilience, manage stress and support the psychological wellbeing of the whole family

Implementing an improved family engagement model within Defence, supported by family sensitive practice amongst health providers, to better support rehabilitation and recovery

Telephone helplines that provide triage services inclusive of mental health for serving personnel

Delivery of the Head to Health digital mental health gateway to provide easier access to information and advice for the general community. Families will be able to access information, advice and digital mental health treatment options

\$2.1 million over two years to Australian Kookaburra Kids Foundation to provide support to children of veterans with mental health conditions