



Senate Inquiry into Suicide by Veterans and Ex-service Personnel (2017) Recommendations

Progress of Implementation as at 24 May 2018

Key:		
✓	Complete	
...	In Progress	
No	Recommendation	Progress
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"> develop and implement specific suicide prevention programs targeted at those veterans identified in at risk groups; and expand the DVA Reconnects Project to proactively contact veterans in these identified in at risk groups. 	<p>The two new suicide prevention pilots announced in the 2017-18 Budget are underway.</p> <p>The Mental Health Clinical Management Pilot will 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 of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) to develop the service model. Service delivery is anticipated to commence from July 2018.</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 has commenced with some testing at a Bundaberg-based practice.</p> <p>The Department has also implemented a number of measures to proactively contact veterans identified as at risk. This includes 'reach out calls' being undertaken by the Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service (VVCS) for clients requiring critical support. DVA professional support workers or WVCS counsellors made sixty five successful reach out calls to veterans who made submissions to the 2017 Senate Inquiry. VVCS made contact with 20 veterans, 4 of whom agreed to further engagement with WVCS, and similarly, DVA professional support staff made contact with 45 veterans. New contact procedures have been implemented in relation to veterans with unsuccessful claims, and veterans who have not been contactable after several attempts.</p>
		...
No	Recommendation	Status

	(Continued...)	<p>The Townsville Community Engagement Pilot will explore if the establishment of a Care Coordination team within the region, comprising a skilled VVCS clinician and two lived experience peers, will enhance the clinical service experience of these clients. The Pilot is running over two years, in four phases, focusing on strengthening relationships with the community, building more effective transitions from hospital to community care, provision of 24 hour care and evaluation in preparation for national implementation. The goal is to enhance the management of 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 VVCS' ability to support clients to access a more holistic model of care that promotes recovery.</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>	
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>An independent study into the mental health impacts of compensation claim assessment process on veterans will be undertaken. An external researcher has commenced a desk-top and literature review, which will form the basis of the study by an independent expert.</p> <p>As part of Veteran Centric Reform (VCR), DVA have met with over a thousand veterans who have had experience with the claiming process, to learn lessons from them. These lessons learnt will influence 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>The 'Incidence of suicide among Serving and Ex-serving ADF personnel' dataset is to be annually updated by AIHW. Defence and DVA are assisting with collection of data. The next release of data will include deaths from 1 January 2001 up to 31 December 2016 and will update the total count of suicide deaths, the comparison rate to the Australian population and trend analysis for ex-serving men aged 18-29. This release is anticipated to occur in the second half of 2018.</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"> requirements for providers to undertake training; and 	<p>An external consultancy has been engaged to undertake this review. This will include a review of veteran-specific online provider training programs, in particular the requirements and incentives to undertake online training.</p>	...

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the introduction of incentives for undertaking online training and demonstrating outcomes in clinical practice. 	<p>The review will involve an environmental scan of current online training programs, consultation with mental health practitioners and peak professional bodies and a practitioner survey. The review will be completed in November 2018.</p>	
<p>5</p> <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 is preparing to implement the White Card on Transition Project. This will ensure 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. This initiative is expected to commence by 30 June 2018.</p> <p>Work currently underway by the Transition Taskforce is connecting DVA earlier with veterans, prior to their separation from military service. For members that are medically discharging or with mental health conditions, this method of connection is ensuring continuity of care. As a component of this work, the Department is currently trialling the Transition Health Assessment Pilot. This Pilot ensures collaboration between DVA, Defence and the Commonwealth Superannuation Corporation to ensure those members 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. The pilot is demonstrating early success, and may be rolled out more broadly.</p> <p>Further to these strategies, the Department is currently trialling the Special Operations Forces Pilot. DVA has been invited into Holsworthy Army Barracks to assist Special Operations Forces members in the process of transitioning from the ADF. Specialised DVA staff meet with the members on base to assess their records of service and medical records, and to develop a plan for their separation and prepare and submit claims. This process aids in providing certainty prior to separation from the military, whilst also ensuring any security issues surrounding Special Operations Forces members' service can be mitigated. This process also allows for more ready access to information directly by the Department, limiting the need to make requests to Defence for access to records.</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.</p>	<p>...</p>

<p>6</p> <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 has formally commenced, following the publication of the terms of reference in March 2018. The terms of reference are consistent with the expectations of the Committee regarding an examination of DVA's legislative framework, governance arrangements, administrative processes and service delivery.</p> <p>Two commissioners have been appointed to oversee the Inquiry. The Productivity Commission Inquiry team is being briefed by DVA and is consulting with non-Government stakeholders. The issues brief was released on 3 May 2018.</p> <p>Public submissions to the inquiry have been called for by 2 July 2018. The Inquiry is expected to report by late June 2019.</p>	<p>...</p>
<p>7</p> <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 VCR Program. The Government has committed a further \$111.9 million in the 2018-19 Budget.</p> <p>The Department continues with development and implementation of MyService to streamline claims. MyService has been developed utilising co-design principles, in consultation with the Department of Defence and the veteran community, to better align with the changing needs of DVA's contemporary client cohort. Usage rates continue to increase, with more than 4,000 registered users to date.</p> <p>MyService provides straight-through processing and decision-ready claims for particular medical conditions, significantly decreasing claims processing time from an average of 120 days, to an average of 33 days in the pilot period. Of note, straight-through processing for PTSD claims for veterans with warlike service was implemented on 8 December 2017.</p>	<p>...</p>
<p>8</p> <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"> • alleviate pressure on claims processing staff and to reduce the backlog of claims; and • increase case coordination staff to assist clients with complex needs 	<p>System enhancements continue, including expansion for <i>Veterans' Entitlements Act 1986 (VEA)</i> and <i>Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Act (Defence-related claims) 1988 (DRCA)</i> claims. Additional resources to assist with claims processing and reduction in backlog were obtained following the \$13.5 million budget allocation in 2017-2018 budget. Work on hand and age of cases on hand have been reduced and times taken to process claims have fallen within targets. Further to this, \$4 million over two years has been committed to pilot the Case Management Pilot, to commence on 1 July 2018. Examination of case management models from Canada, the United Kingdom, and the Department of Human Services has occurred to identify best practice</p>	<p>...</p>

	(Continued...)	models for delivery of the program. Advice was also sought from DVA's Mental Health Clinical Reference Committee, the Commonwealth Ombudsman, and VVCS.	
	<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"> • have an understanding of the realities of military service; • have an understanding of health issues of veterans; • have appropriate communication skills to engage with clients with mental health conditions; and • have sufficient training to interpret medical assessment and reports. 	<p>A review of DVA training to ensure relevancy and appropriateness has commenced. A consultancy was selected to review the appropriateness and effectiveness of DVA's client service training approach and the relevance, accuracy and effectiveness of its programs. A Steering Committee has been established and Terms of Reference finalised. The Committee held a project initiation meeting on 2 May 2018.</p>	...
	<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"> • assessments undertaken are appropriate to the conditions considered; • that the medical professionals used have undertaken training on treating veterans and can demonstrate their expertise working amongst this client group; and • the need for independent medical assessments where information is already available from the veteran's own doctor or treating specialist. 	<p>As part of the DVA Transformation Program, an internal review of the issues associated with the collection of medical evidence is underway. 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. The review is expected to be completed by the end of 2018.</p>	...
11	<p>The committee recommends the Department of Veterans' Affairs expand its online engagement with younger veterans through social media to</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</p>	...

	raise awareness regarding available support services.	Website and on the DVA Intranet for use of staff in providing support and assistance to veterans. 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/comments raised by individuals.	
12	The committee recommends that the reference to the Productivity Commission should also include examination of the following areas in the Veterans' Affairs portfolio: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • governance arrangements; • administrative processes; and • service delivery. 	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. Two commissioners have been appointed to oversee the Inquiry. The Productivity Commission Inquiry team is being briefed by DVA and is consulting with non-Government stakeholders. The issues brief was released on 3 May 2018. Public submissions to the inquiry have been called for by 2 July 2018. The Inquiry is expected to report by late June 2019.	...
13	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.	The ANAO audit of <i>The efficiency of veterans' service delivery by the Department of Veterans' Affairs</i> is in report preparation stage. Public contributions to the audit closed on 31 March 2018. The final report is expected to be tabled in June 2018.	...
14	The committee recommends that the Transition Taskforce examine and address: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • any gaps in medical services or income support for veterans in transition or immediately following transition; • barriers to employment for veterans who are transitioning such as workers' insurance issues and civilian recognition of qualifications, skills and training; and • disincentives for veterans to undertake work or study resulting from the legislative 	The Transition Taskforce has completed the first phase of its work which identified the barriers to an effective transition. The report on this initial stage of work has been provided to Government for consideration. 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 will be available to eligible veterans and dependants with entitlement under the <i>Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2004</i> (MRCA), and will continue up until six weeks after a decision is made in relation to a liability claim. The 2018-19 Budget includes measures to:	...

	<p>or policy frameworks of the Department of Veterans' Affairs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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, commencing 1 July 2018. • 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. • support the Prime Minister's Veterans Employment Program. The measure ensures that businesses will continue to be recognised in their efforts to employ veterans and assists veterans gaining employment on leaving the Australian Defence Force. <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>	
<p>15</p>	<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"> • claims case management; • healthcare, mental health and wellbeing support; • employment assistance programs; • social connectedness programs; and • health and wellbeing programs. 	<p>As per the response to recommendation five, the Special Operations Forces Pilot is currently underway to support members to navigate the transition process, noting the increased complexity of claims for this veteran group. This launched at Holsworthy Barracks on 15 January and will test a client-focused, tailored model that aims to provide a seamless, end-to-end experience for Australian Defence Force (ADF) members and their families when they transition out of the ADF. If successful, the model may be applied across the broader cohort of separating members to ensure they are well informed and fully connected to DVA support and services, prior to leaving the military.</p> <p>As per recommendation eight, \$4 million over two years has been provided for the Case Management Pilot. One component of this pilot is specifically targeted to transitioning members. This pilot is to commence 1 July 2018. Examination of case management models from Canada, the United Kingdom, and the Department of Human Services has occurred to determine a fit-for-purpose case management model. Other expert advice has also been obtained on best practice case management.</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>The 2018-19 Budget includes measures to:</p>	<p>...</p>

<p>(Continued...)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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, commencing 1 July 2018. • support the Prime Minister's Veterans Employment Program. The measure ensures that businesses will continue to be recognised in their efforts to employ veterans and assists veterans gaining employment on leaving the Australian Defence Force. 	
<p>16</p> <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 preparing to implement the White Card on Transition Project. This will ensure the issue of a White Card to all separating members with at least one day of continuous full time service.</p> <p>DVA will be issuing White Cards for treatment of mental health conditions to transitioning members by 30 June 2018.</p>	<p>...</p>
<p>17</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>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.</p>	<p>...</p>
<p>18</p> <p>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>	<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. These include the development of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a website containing information specific to veterans seeking employment in the Australian Public Service (APS); • a guide that aligns Australian Defence Force (ADF) ranks to APS classifications; and • a practical toolkit to guide veterans through the process of applying for an APS job. <p>Informal feedback has been positive with a particular focus on the webpage video depicting the transition of veterans into public service careers.</p>	<p>...</p>
<p>19</p> <p>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,</p>	<p>A review of support for partners of veterans to identify further avenues for assistance is currently in the planning stages.</p> <p>A budget commitment of \$7.1m over four year provides additional support for MRCA veterans who have rendered warlike service and for the partners of veterans with warlike service who</p>	

<p>counselling, peer support and options for family respite care to support partners of veterans.</p>	<p>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"> o <u>Additional child care support</u> for pre and primary school aged children to reduce barriers to a veteran’s rehabilitation o <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. <p>Widowed partners may also be able to access:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o <u>Home help</u> within and around the home to assist the proper functioning or maintenance of the environment of the residence for a 2 year period from the date of death of the veteran. o <u>Counselling support</u> to assist widowed partners in managing challenging life circumstances following the death of their partner. 4 sessions per year for a 2 year period following the death of the veteran may be accessed. o <u>Additional childcare support</u> for pre and primary school aged children to assist widowed partners. <p>This measure commenced on 1 May 2018.</p> <p>Consultation with key stakeholders, such as the Partners of Veterans Association, is also occurring with VVCS. Continued consultation will occur to identify service gaps and how services may be further tailored to better support families of current serving and ex-serving ADF members.</p> <p>Further to this, the Families Forum was held on 1 October 2017 to facilitate consultation with families.</p> <p>A Female Veterans and Veterans Families workshop recall workshop is scheduled for June 18 and topics to be discussed include family resilience training, veterans family-focused information and the focus and structure of the proposed 2018 forum in September.</p>	<p>...</p>
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<p>The committee recommends:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the Australian Government expand the Veterans and Community Grants program to support the provision of alternative therapies to veterans with mental health conditions; and 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. 	<p>Initial planning has commenced for the strategic review of the Department's grants programs, including supporting the provision of alternative therapies.</p>	<p>...</p>
<p>21</p> <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>A psychiatric assistance dog trial will be undertaken to assess the impact on the mental health outcomes for veterans with PTSD – as an adjunct to treatment. The Department is assessing submissions following a Request for Expressions of Interest (REOI) to inform future options for the service delivery for the proposed trial. A separate procurement will engage an evaluation provider to support the evaluation of the trial.</p>	<p>...</p>
<p>22</p> <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"> create and maintain a public database of services available to veterans; and provide an information service to assist veterans and families connect and access appropriate services provided by ex-service organisations and others. 	<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>The Community Coordination Team Pilot is underway in Townsville. As part of this DVA is working towards an online peer network to connect community and professional resources.</p> <p>A Community Coordination Team has been established and is working with the local community. The Defence Engage website is now accessible through the VVCS website.</p>	<p>...</p>

<p>23</p> <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>Consistent with recommendation nineteen arising from the Jesse Bird Joint Inquiry, \$1.7 million has been committed to scoping study on veterans' advocacy and support services. Terms of reference were recently approved, and the study has commenced. The study is being led by Mr Robert Cornall AO. DVA anticipates that Mr Cornall's discussion paper will be released shortly inviting public submissions. It is expected that Mr Cornall's report to the Government will be provided late 2018.</p>	<p>...</p>
<p>24</p> <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 will be considered as a part of the scoping study on veterans' advocacy and support services (as per recommendation 23). Terms of reference have been approved and the study is underway.</p>	<p>...</p>