

To the STANDING COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENCE AND TRADE

Further to the appearance by the undersigned to the Brisbane hearing of the Committee, we were asked if there were any recommendations we could make to the Committee. In considering this request after our appearance, we have 7 recommendations we wish to make in this regard.

1) **Financial advice.** Coming from a conflict zone presents many challenges.

One of which is that service personnel have been absent, or in the case of veterans financial advice is critical to assist in their financial situation. This is also especially true for any service personnel who may have receive a lump sum payout for injuries etc.

The Network recommends free access to financial advisors for all veterans and ex and serving personnel.

2) **Incentives for psychiatrists/psychologists to work especially with veterans.**

Prof Mal Hopwood (President of the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists also alluded to the lack of psychiatrists/psychologists sufficiently skilled enough to engage with veterans and service personnel and their particular focus certainly around PTSD.

The Network recommends that a financial incentive via a specific medicare item number be established for all psychiatrists/psychologists to provide treatment and care to veterans and service personnel.

3) **Screening of all veterans, returning service personnel from war zones, peace keeping forces for mental health issues.**

We believe it is crucial to routinely screen all veterans and returning service personnel for emerging mental health issues. Early identification and early intervention is the best possible outcome. For example, if we compare the significant investment of \$85 million (provided by the Commonwealth \$50 m and the states \$35 m over 5 years) for post-natal depression, the Network recommends that a similar initiative is introduced to screen for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

4) **Twelve month follow up.**

As with the Post-natal depression initiative the Network recommends that all veterans, service personnel and peace keeping force members are followed up after a 12 months period of returning to Australia.

The Network recommends that processes within the Veterans Affairs Department for claims are streamlined to ensure timely access, response and support for veterans and returning personnel.

6) **Community support programs and other initiatives** have been critical in supporting recovery in the broader mental health areas.

The Committee would have heard from a number of peer led initiatives in the veterans community. The Network recommends financial support to specific programs (like the assistance dogs) which have proven to be successful in assisting veterans and service personnel normalise life and assist in the recovery journey.

7) **Access to community programs.**

As the Committee would have heard, one of the things that we provided information on was the real benefit of providing or receiving supports in the community.

The Network recommends that all veterans and service personnel are provided with information on supports within the community.

Thank you for the opportunity of providing this further input.

We are happy to further discuss if needed.

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**Ms Janne McMahon, OAM**

**Chair & Executive Officer**

**Mr Norm Wotherspoon**

**Queensland Director and veteran**