



The Hon Darren Chester MP

Minister for Veterans' Affairs

Minister for Defence Personnel

Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Centenary of ANZAC

MC18-002679

Senator Alex Gallacher
Senator for South Australia
Chair
Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

18 SEP 2018

Dear Senator *Alex*

I am writing in response to your letter of 3 September 2018, concerning the current Senate Inquiry into the use of antimalarial drugs mefloquine and tafenoquine in the Australian Defence Force (ADF).


The Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) ensured staff were present as observers at the public hearings of the Committee in Brisbane on 30 August 2018 and Townsville on 31 August 2018, in order to facilitate access to support and services if required by witnesses. In response to concerns raised by some witnesses at the hearings, DVA and the Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service (VVCS) have offered these people access to counselling support and/or assistance with accessing DVA supports and services where required.

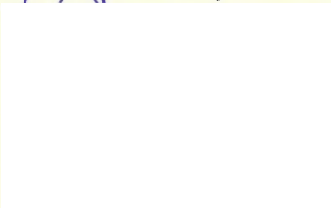
With respect to the commitments made by the then Minister for Veterans' Affairs, the Hon Dan Tehan MP, I can advise these have either been met or are ongoing. I draw the Committee's attention to the submission to the inquiry from DVA which provides more information about services and supports available to veterans and their families; and the future action plan involving further outreach, communications and research in this area.

I can also advise that DVA has reached out to a number of persons following the hearings of 30 and 31 August 2018 with an offer to pay for an independent scribe to assist with submissions to the Inquiry.

DVA will also have observers in attendance at the next public hearing of this inquiry in Canberra, and will offer support where required. The Committee may also wish to consider making support available which is independent from DVA and VVCS, if that would better meet the needs of some witnesses.

Thank you for bringing this matter to my attention.

 Yours sincerely



DARREN CHESTER
Encl

Addressing Mefloquine Concerns

Election Commitment	Status
Develop a more comprehensive online resource that will provide information on anti-malarial medications	<p>Completed</p> <p>A dedicated online resource 'Malaria, mefloquine and the ADF' is available through the ADF Health and Wellbeing Portal on the Defence website, and an email address was developed as a means of contact for public enquiries (adf.malaria@defence.gov.au).</p> <p>Information about health and other support services available to those concerned about mefloquine and how to access them is available on the DVA website.</p>
Establish a dedicated DVA mefloquine support team to assist our serving and ex- serving ADF community with mefloquine-related claims, which will provide a specialised point of contact with DVA	<p>In Progress</p> <p>DVA established a dedicated support team to assist with mefloquine-related claims in November 2016. A dedicated 1800 freecall number is now in place for individuals who are concerned about the side-effects or are seeking assistance to connect with non-liability health care and supports. The freecall number is 1800 MEFLOQUINE.</p>
Direct the inter-departmental Defence-DVA Links Steering Committee to examine the issues raised, consider existing relevant medical evidence and provide advice to the Government by November 2016	<p>Completed</p> <p>On 4 November 2016, the Defence-DVA Links Steering Committee provided a report to Government that examined the issues raised about mefloquine, considered existing relevant medical evidence, and made the following recommendations:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That a temporary outreach program be opened in Townsville for up to one week to provide easy access to information and assistance for members of the ADF who have been administered mefloquine; and 2. That a report on the outcomes and issues raised at the outreach program be tabled at a future Defence-DVA Links Steering Committee meeting.
Establish a formal community consultation mechanism to provide an open dialogue on issues concerning mefloquine between the Defence-DVA Links Steering Committee and the serving and ex-serving ADF community	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>DVA, in collaboration with Defence, the Repatriation Medical Authority and the Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service, ran an outreach program in Townsville from 13-15 December 2016. The purpose of the outreach program was to provide serving and ex-serving ADF members who were prescribed mefloquine or tafenoquine with easy access to information and face-to-face assistance.</p> <p>In addition, DVA is planning national outreach program from September 2018, starting in South Australia.</p> <p>An information paper has been made available for distribution to ESO networks and is publically available from the DVA mefloquine webpage, including an index directing people to available resources and support.</p>