

Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade

Suicide by veterans and ex-service personnel inquiry – 6 February 2017

ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Defence

Topic: Mental health training provided to Defence supervisors and health personnel.

Question reference number: 1

Senator: Moore

Type of question: Written

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 24 February 2017

Question:

Senator MOORE: Chair, could I put two questions on notice? Air Vice Marshal Smart, one is to look at the personnel training in terms of the professional staff you have within the Defence Force, in terms of psychiatrists, psychologists and specialist trainers—an idea of the staffing and their training? Also, could I find out, particularly in supervisor/officer training, what work is done at that level on how you look at those issues and debunking from the supervisor level? The stuff we get back, most often anecdotally, is that the first line of supervision is where it goes wrong and that is where the lack of trust is most difficult.

Answer:

Workforce and staffing

Defence provides evidence-based treatment aligned to Medicare standards and delivered by qualified and credentialed mental health professionals and specialists.

Defence employs or contracts health professionals with tertiary level qualifications who are credentialed and competent to deliver 'Focused Psychological Strategies' as defined under the Medicare schedule. These include medical officers, psychologists, mental health social workers mental health nurses and psychiatrists. Within Defence these disciplines are collectively referred to as mental health professionals. In addition to providing clinical assessment and treatment, many of these mental health professionals also conduct mental health awareness training as part of their role in Defence.

All mental health professionals regardless of their discipline are qualified and Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency registered. They are capable of providing assessment and treatment of mental health concerns, including risk assessment and management.

| Numbers of mental health professionals by discipline | Total |
|---|--------------|
| Psychologists, Social Workers and Mental Health Nurses | 1,670 |
| Medical Officers | 175 |
| Psychiatrists | 276 |
| Total | 2,121 |

The Australian Defence Force (ADF) employs 285 full-time equivalent positions in the mental health workforce consisting of 110 mental health professionals and 175 medical officers. This includes the Australian Defence Force, Australian Public Service and contracted workforce. There are an additional 270 psychiatrists and 1,560 psychologists available under the Medibank Health Solutions contract. This total number may vary as the number of available service providers within a region changes over time.

Of the total number of psychiatrists available for referral, approximately 44 are regularly referred to either due to their previous ADF service or their long term experience providing clinical services to Defence members. Arrangements are in place for delivery of on-base psychiatric services at Lavarack Barracks in Townsville and Enoggera Barracks in Brisbane.

Defence has access to specialist psychiatric advice, consultation and clinical care through contracting arrangements and from within the specialist reserves of each Service. Defence has access to six psychiatrists comprising one who serves in the Navy, four in the Army and one in the Air Force Reserves. These reservists provide support to Defence through a range of specialist clinical activity, research and policy advice. One of these specialist reservists is also contracted as a senior consultant psychiatrist at the ADF Centre for Mental Health.

The *2016 Defence White Paper* People Initiatives, articulated in the Defence Strategic Workforce Plan 2016-2026, provides the funding to expand the Medical Specialist Program to include an additional seven specialist psychiatrist or trainee registrar positions.

It is important to note that as part of the Defence health system, other health professionals such as physiotherapists and rehabilitation consultants, while not specifically mental health professionals, make significant contributions to the delivery of holistic health care, rehabilitation and recovery for Defence members receiving mental health care.

Additionally, under the Defence/Department of Veterans' Affairs Memorandum of Understanding, Joint Health Command has in place an Agreement for Services with the Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service for the provision of assessment and counselling support. Referrals are made through a Defence Mental Health Professional within the Garrison Health Service.

Training

The 2011 Australian Defence Force Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy '*Capability through mental fitness*' outlines the Military Occupational Mental Health and Wellbeing Model. This model provides a framework for interventions, which includes the development and facilitation of training to enhance the mental health and wellbeing of ADF members. One of the strategic objectives is to promote and support mental fitness within the ADF through continued training to increase awareness, reduce stigma and improve the mental health literacy of ADF personnel.

Training is delivered at all stages of the training continuum, from initial recruit and officer training through various stages of career progression including supervisor, leader and command training courses. Additionally, mental health awareness and skills training is delivered throughout the deployment cycle, and following specific requests from commanders where a particular need has been identified. Training for ADF personnel, including supervisors and commanders consists of the following:

Awareness Training

- ADF Mental Health Awareness Presentation – Commanders are able to request of Joint Health Command or through their single Service resources, for presentations to their soldiers, sailors and airmen/women or specifically for their junior leaders and non-commissioned officers and commanders, on general mental health issues and an overview of the mental health support available in the ADF.
- Suicide Prevention Awareness Presentation – Annual Suicide Prevention Awareness training is the Level 1 training component of the ADF Suicide Prevention Program. This training is mandatory for all ADF personnel and is available via face-to-face or via Campus (Defence's web-based and instructor led training on the Corporate Learning Management System).
- Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs Awareness Presentation – Annual Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs Awareness training is the Level 1 component of the ADF Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs Program. It is mandatory for all ADF personnel and is available via face-to-face or Campus (Defence's web-based and instructor led training on the Corporate Learning Management System).
- ADF Mental Health Day – ADF Mental Health Day is a component of a broader suite of mental health awareness and promotion initiatives that encourages opportunity for all members of the ADF, both full time and part time, to stop and reflect on their own mental health and that of their colleagues. It is command-driven providing commanders and leaders opportunities and resources to engage with ADF members, at all ranks, in building trust and confidence that they and their families will receive evidence-based support as required without judgment. The event is publicly endorsed by ADF Senior Leadership, and in collaboration with Joint Health Command and the single Services, the Regional Mental Health Team Coordinators assist in organising a range of targeted activities/promotions conducted during the period 1 to 31 October each year.

Skills training

- BattleSMART (Self Management and Resilience Training) – A modularised education program of two-three hours duration that teaches resilience training at key points throughout a member’s career, including during recruit and officer training, pre-deployment for formed bodies in Army, and for instructors in training establishments. It is a preventive resilience program designed to enhance an individual’s ability to cope effectively with increased stress and adverse or potentially traumatic events in their lives.
- Mental Health and Wellbeing in the ADF: Issues for Commanders – Mental health awareness training is provided through Command courses. The training covers issues such as:
 - the role of commanders and leaders in the management of mental health;
 - the challenges to addressing mental health issues and awareness of key mental health policy;
 - process and programs such as complex case management;
 - self-care for commanders; and
 - Critical Incident Mental Health Support and management of suicide and alcohol misuse in Defence.
- This training is delivered by ADF mental health professionals to courses including Joint Service Warrant Officers Course, Navy Executive Officers Training Course and each of the single Service pre-Command courses held annually. Annual presentations are also provided to commanders through the Defence Staff College.
- Keep Your Mates Safe - Low Risk Drinking - This is the Level 2 component of the ADF Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs Program and is aimed at personnel who regularly socialise and drink alcohol. It is an education workshop that informs members how to keep themselves and mates safe when out drinking.
- Keep Your Mates Safe - Peer Support Program – This program is intended to address stigma associated with mental health problems, increase awareness of support services available to ADF members and provide participants with practical skills to assist themselves and others to take action if a mental health problem is identified. The Keep Your Mates Safe Peer Support Program contributes to the literacy, awareness and training for ADF members.
- Keep Your Mates Safe - Suicide Prevention Training – This is the Level 2 training component of the ADF Suicide Prevention Program. This training is designed for all Defence members, targeting peers, junior leaders, commanders and managers, with the goal of enabling them to identify persons at risk of suicide and direct them to mental health first aid and health resources. It can be provided as a separate workshop or as a component of the Keep Your Mates Safe Peer Support Program.

- Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training – This is the Level 3 component of suicide prevention training encompassing suicide first aid gatekeeper training in the form of Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training. Unlike Levels 1, 2 and 4 suicide prevention training, Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training is a commercial suicide prevention training package. It was developed by LivingWorks and is internationally recognised. Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training provides participants with the skills to identify at-risk individuals, and facilitate safety planning and access to mental health support. Within Defence, Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training is primarily targeted at junior leaders, commanders, managers, health professionals and Chaplains.
- Mental Health First Aid, Australia - The Mental Health First Aid course (Developed by Mental Health First Aid Australia under an Australian Government funding grant) is delivered to Special Operations Command personnel over a two day period. The aim of the course is to improve mental health literacy, as well as improve skills for early identification and supporting members with mental health issues. Courses are scheduled into strategic breaks in Unit training programs with intent to train and re-qualify Special Operations Command personnel every three years. The course is also being trialed in other parts of the Army.
- Critical Incident Mental Health Support for Commanders - This training is designed to educate commanders at all ranks on the Critical Incident Mental Health Support process and what support they can expect to receive after a critical incident.
- Critical Incident Mental Health Support Peer Advisor - This is a two-day course providing Ship Warrant Officers, Chief of Boats and Clinical Managers with the knowledge and skills required to perform the Critical Incident Mental Health Support Peer Advisor role on a Major Fleet Unit or submarine. The role of Critical Incident Mental Health Support peer advisor is unique to Navy. Their role is to support Command in the immediate aftermath of incidents where mental health professionals are not readily available. Critical Incident Mental Health Support Peer Advisors are trained to promote engagement in the Critical Incident Mental Health Support process, assist personnel experiencing mental health problems, provide unit liaison with Critical Incident Mental Health Support responders and provide basic Critical Incident Mental Health Support framework advice to Command.
- Navy, Army, and Air Force Pre-deployment Brief – This pre-deployment brief is delivered to all members conducting Force Preparation for deployment. The brief is 60 minutes in duration. It covers the following areas: (1) Realities of the operation, including operational tempo, communication with family; potential challenges, potentially traumatic events and coping mechanisms; (2) Brief overview and application of the BattleSMART (resilience) model; and (3) Mental Health and Psychology support services and resources.
- Navy Pre-deployment Brief - The Navy Pre-deployment Brief is delivered to ships prior to an operational deployment. The group-delivered Pre-deployment Brief is 1.5 hours in duration. The brief covers the following areas: (1) Realities of the operation, including operational tempo, communication with family; potential challenges, potentially traumatic events and coping mechanisms;

- (2) Overview and application of the BattleSMART (resilience) model; and
 - (3) Mental Health and Psychology support services and resources.
- Operation RESOLUTE Resilience Brief - The Operation RESOLUTE Resilience Brief is delivered to Navy crews assigned to RESOLUTE. The group-delivered Resilience Brief is 1.5 hours in duration. The brief covers the following areas: (1) Realities of Operation RESOLUTE, including operational tempo, communication with family; potential challenges and body recovery; (2) Overview and application of the BattleSMART (resilience) model; and (3) Mental Health and Psychology support services and resources.

Training for Defence health professionals

Defence supports its health professionals to maintain their clinical skills and competency to provide evidence based mental health interventions through access to externally provided professional development courses. These include, but are not limited to, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Cognitive Processing Therapy, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder treatment and exposure based therapy.

Additionally, Defence provides access to the following internally provided training:

- Mental Health Screening - Mental health screening training is provided to Defence psychologists, mental health professionals and other identified non-mental health professionals such as Examiners Psychological to enable early identification of the development of long-term mental health problems and mental disorders and ensure that the member is referred for early treatment services.
- Acute Mental Health on Operations - The Acute Mental Health on Operations program is professional upskilling for medics, psychologists, nurses and doctors in the assessment and management of acute mental health presentations in the deployed environment. Acute Mental Health on Operations provides the knowledge and practical skills to assess and manage a member with an acute mental health problem or disorder until remission of the condition or the member is evacuated out of the area of operations. Acute Mental Health on Operations is a two day course that is mandatory for all ADF Health personnel deploying on operations.
- Mental Health Risk Assessment Training - The Mental Health Risk Assessment Training program is mandatory professional upskilling for all mental health professionals working in Defence, including Medical Officers, Psychologists, Mental Health Nurses and Social Workers. Mental Health Risk Assessment Training is a one day program that provides the knowledge and skills for the assessment and initial management of members presenting with risks of suicide, self harm and/or harm to others.
- Clinician Administered Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Scale - The Clinician Administered Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Scale program is clinical professional upskilling for the Defence mental health workforce. The Clinician Administered Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Scale is a diagnostic psychometric instrument used to inform the assessment, treatment and management of Australian Defence Force members presenting with Post Traumatic Stress

Disorder. This course is run on request through the ADF Centre for Mental Health.

- Mental Status Examination – The Defence mental health workforce is provided with training in the conduct of a mental status examination. The program provides the necessary knowledge and skills to assess mental status and document results in a standardised format as a fundamental component of a comprehensive mental health assessment. This course is run on request through the ADF Centre for Mental Health.
- Assessment and Case Formulation - The Assessment and Case Formulation program is clinical professional upskilling for the Defence mental health workforce. It was developed by the ADF Centre for Mental Health in partnership with Phoenix Australia and provides the knowledge and skills to conduct a comprehensive mental health assessment and develop a formulation to support an appropriate pathway to care for ADF members presenting with mental health problems.