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## NATIONAL COMMISSIONER FOR DEFENCE AND VETERAN SUICIDE PREVENTION

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### ORYGEN SUBMISSION

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Orygen is the world's leading research and knowledge translation organisation focusing on mental ill-health in young people. Working side-by-side with young people, our partners and one another, we're redefining what's possible in global research, policy, education and clinical care.

Orygen provides evidence-based policy advice to governments, research funders and system planners and service providers. In addition to leading research evidence and input from young people, key stakeholders and subject matter experts; this advice is based on analysis of national and international datasets.

## ESTABLISHMENT OF A NATIONAL COMMISSIONER

Orygen welcomes the establishment of a National Commissioner for Defence and Veteran Suicide Prevention. The experiences of service and transition into civilian life can be challenging, especially young veterans. This challenge can have consequences on their mental health and contribute to a heightened risk of suicide. This office will have the responsibility and opportunity to set up structures and services to support veterans with this challenge as part of its suicide prevention remit.

## YOUNG VETERANS

Young people experience the highest rate of mental ill-health of any age group in the Australian Defence Force (ADF) young ex-serving male personnel (aged 18-24 years) have a suicide rate twice as high as civilian peers.<sup>(1)</sup>

**The heightened suicide risk for young veterans and the need for targeted responses should be identified in the legislated role of the National Commissioner for Defence and Veteran Suicide Prevention.**

In 2018, Orygen and Phoenix Australia released a report that presented policy solutions for restructuring support services within the ADF, addressing the challenge of transitioning out of service and detailed a model for targeted support hubs for young veterans.

Younger veterans engaged for the project told us that in hindsight they could see the level of need they had for support services, but at the time of transitioning had poor awareness of what was available and did not actively seek out information.

Support services need to be developed to support young veterans, recognising the experience of transition and barriers to help-seeking. Younger veterans should be co-designers of support services to ensure it is appropriate to their requirements.

The report, *The Next Post: Young people transitioning from military service and their mental health* can be downloaded [here](#). Orygen can provide a briefing for the incoming National Commissioner on the report.

## REVOLUTION IN MIND

## TARGETED SUPPORT HUBS

Targeted and uniquely branded support ‘hubs’ for transitioning and young veterans would provide psychosocial support services and suicide prevention programs designed for this age group. Support hubs would provide an accessible point of contact to help young veterans navigate available support and a point of coordination and (if necessary) case management for service access and delivery. Three levels of service would be provided based on the risk (low, moderate, and high) of mental health or psychosocial adjustment problems.

Targeted support hubs	
Opportunity	Mechanism
<p><b>Targeted and uniquely branded support ‘hubs’ for transitioning and young ex-service personnel (with scope to extend into the 25-29 age range) are required.</b></p> <p><b>These local hubs would provide:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a point of coordination and (if necessary) case management for the individual, family, command and appropriate services</li> <li>• an accessible point of contact for ex-serving personnel to navigate available support.</li> </ul> <p><b>Three levels of service would be provided based on the risk (low, moderate, and high) of mental health or psychosocial adjustment problems.</b></p>	<p>Coordinated by the Department of Veterans’ Affairs and Defence with linkages with PHNs, veteran and community specialist mental health services and ESOs.</p>

## SUICIDE PREVENTION

Delivering suicide prevention programs to young veterans needs to address the risk of social isolation they can face. Young veterans can find it difficult to re-establish in the community, the strong sense of identity and social connections derived from membership of the ADF.

Connecting to young veterans through social media and online services is an option. Orygen, heard from younger veterans consulted for *The Next Post* project that access to online services designed for them would be desirable. There is limited evidence for technology-based suicide prevention interventions for young people. Some studies have shown effects on a range of outcome measures including decreases in suicidal ideation(2, 3) for young people, but not with young veterans. As such, there is an opportunity to develop and trial a digital suicide prevention intervention for young veterans.

Online suicide prevention	
Opportunity	Mechanism
<p><b>Proactive use of digital platforms to deliver suicide prevention programs and interventions to young veterans need to be developed and trialled.</b></p> <p><b>A young veteran specific intervention should consider:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• design of interface and functionality;</li> <li>• how to connect with existing suicide prevention responses;</li> <li>• digital screening tools;</li> <li>• providing access to clinically accredited and evidence-based treatment; and</li> <li>• engaging young veterans in the design process.</li> </ul>	<p>Orygen, Department of Veterans’ Affairs and ESOs.</p>

If you have any questions, please contact:

Vivienne Browne,  
Associate Director, Government Relations and Policy

## REFERENCES

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