

Question on notice no. 6

Portfolio question number: 6

2021-22 Budget estimates

Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee, Defence Portfolio

Senator Jacqui Lambie: asked the Department of Veterans' Affairs on 2 June 2021

Senator LAMBIE: I'm terribly concerned because people are still struggling to get in to see her at all. I've tried to help one person to find a time to meet with her, but it just isn't happening. Does she have the time and resources she needs to be able to do this job properly?

Ms Cosson: She has access to the whole department if she needs it. Certainly, Ms Cherne has been very active in engaging and she's given me a list of the events that she has actually attended and the veterans she has communicated with. But what we are establishing is a separate web presence for her so that, if people do want to engage with her, they can do that, rather than going through the department.

Senator LAMBIE: Ms Cosson, do you think you could table that list that you just mentioned of who she's met with since she's been in, what she's done, the events she's been to?

Ms Cosson: Certainly.

Senator LAMBIE: That would be great. Because I am having a lot of people having difficulty in getting in to see her. I do hear, coming from inside, that she's extremely under strain. I've even gone as far to speak to the defence assistant minister to get her some help. She's under strain here, Secretary, and she needs extra hands on deck now.

Ms Cosson: I will take that-

Senator LAMBIE: Not mucking around. She doesn't have a whole department. It doesn't work like that. She needs people that are close to her. She's not getting around fast enough, and it's putting a lot of pressure on her. Could you please look into it?

Ms Cosson: I'll take that on notice and have a talk with the Veteran Family Advocate on what she requires.

Answer —

Answer attached

Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade
Budget Estimates 2021-2022 – 2 June 2021
Answers to questions on notice from the Veterans' Affairs portfolio

Question 6

Outcome: All Program: All

Topic: Veteran Family Advocate

(FADT Hansard Proof 2 June 2021, p 107)

Senator Jacqui Lambie asked:

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Answer

In a significant step towards promoting better outcomes for veterans' families, Commissioner Gwen Cherne was appointed as the first Veteran Family Advocate, commencing in the role on 24 August 2020. Commissioner Cherne is appointed as a Commissioner to the Repatriation Commission and the Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Commission and represents the perspectives of veterans' families in ongoing policy and decision making across government.

The Veteran Family Advocate has appropriate resources to fulfil her role of providing strategic advice to Government for veteran and their families. The Veteran Family Advocate is supported by an Executive Assistant, a Project Officer, and the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) and providing a Family Support Officer to help manage welfare issues.

The Veteran Family Advocate is also supported indirectly by the resources of the department through providing pathways for veterans and their families to access a range of support services

including case work, counselling and peer support through the Triage and Connect, Open Arms – Veterans’ and Families Counselling (Open Arms) and Wellbeing and Support Programs. DVA and Open Arms assist by providing rapid responses to emerging welfare events and clinical outreach supports to veterans and their families referred by the Veteran Family Advocate.

When the Veteran Family Advocate has a concern for the mental health and wellbeing of a veteran or family member, a request is raised for an urgent reach-out call, via the 24/7 Open Arms Client Assist Contact Centre. The team follows up and coordinates support from within DVA and appropriate external community health services.

Between April and May 2021, the Veteran Family Advocate co-chaired Open Arms Regional Advisory Forums in Adelaide, Townsville, Sydney, Hobart and Brisbane. Commissioner Cherne met with individual stakeholders and key organisations in the veteran community on mental health and wellbeing priorities. These visits will continue as COVID-19 restrictions permit.

Since appointment, the Veteran Family Advocate has engaged in more than 7,600 instances of verbal and written communications with veterans and/or their families including phone calls, emails, letters, text messages, social media, presentations and meetings. The meetings consist of government entities: (e.g. The Minister, Defence, Navy, Army, Airforce, DVA, Open Arms, National Mental Health Commission), Ex-Service Organisations and Roundtables. Further details of Veteran Family Advocate engagements have been listed below.

Regular/Scheduled Meetings Attended From August 2020 – July 2021:

Daily:

- VFA Team Meeting

Weekly:

- 1 on 1 Meeting with the Secretary
- Commissioners’ Meeting
- Secretary's weekly meeting with all SES
- Secretary's Executive catch up (twice per week)

Fortnightly:

- Secretary's Pandemic Fortnightly Discussion
- National Mental Health Commission (Christine Morgan)
- Open Arms - Dr Stephanie Hodson
- Defence Families Australia

Monthly:

- Commissioner and First Assistant Secretary Monthly Informal Discussion
- Executive Leadership Group
- Executive Management Board
- Pre-brief: Repatriation Commission & Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Commission Meeting
- Repatriation Commission & Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Commission Meeting
- Repatriation Commission & Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Commission Subcommittee
- Repatriation Commission /Monthly Deputy Commissioners' Meeting

Quarterly:

- Commonwealth, State and Territories Committee
- Council for Women and Families United by Defence Service
- Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care Expert Advisory Group for the Independent Review of Past Defence and Veteran Suicides
- Ex-Service Organisation Round Table
- Open Arms National Advisory Council
- National Consultation Framework Forum - Operational Working Party
- Pandemic Response Management Team
- Prime Ministers Advisory Council on Veterans' Mental Health
- Transitioning Members Case Management Steering Committee
- Service Families Research Consortium

Annually:

- Female Veterans and Families Forum

Various Meetings And Events Attended From August 2020 – July 2021:

- 42 for 42
- ACT Ex-Service Organisation Consultative Forum
- ADF Support and VSO Team Seminar
- Anzac Day, Townsville
- Attorney-General's Department
- Australian Airforce
- Australian Army
- Australian Catholic University
- Australian Defence Force
- Australian Navy
- Australian Partners of Defence
- Australian SAS Association AGM Meeting
- Australian Special Forces Group
- Australian Trade and Investment Commission (Austrade)
- Australian War Memorial Council
- Australian War Widows
- Cams Cause
- Carry On Victoria
- ComCare
- Commando Welfare Trust
- Commissioner and First Assistant Secretary Monthly Informal Discussion
- Commonwealth, State and Territory Committee Meeting
- Community and Social Inclusion ACT
- Connected By Organisation
- Cor Infinitus
- Council for Women and Families United by Defence Service
- DC NSW Consultative Forum
- Defence Families of Australia
- Defence Force Welfare Association
- Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal

- Department of Trade, Business and Innovation NT
- Deputy Commissioner Victoria & Ex-Service Organisation Consultative Forum
- Deputy Commissioner WA Consultative Forum
- DVA Executive Meetings (Heads of Departments)
- Expert Advisory Group - Independent Review of Past Defence and Veteran Suicides
- Family and Domestic Violence Implementation Group Meeting
- Female Veterans & Veterans' Families Policy Forum
- Gallipoli Medical Research Foundation
- Gallipoli Scholarship Fund
- Gotcha 4 Life
- Governor General
- Australian Civil-Military Centre
- Interrelate
- Intimate Partner Violence Project Advisory Committee Meeting
- Joint Transition Authority Meeting
- JTA Consultation Conference
- Kapyong Day, Townsville
- Kokoda Track Memorial Walkway Board
- Legacy
- Mid North Coast Veterans' Advocates' Community of Practice Network Annual Seminar
- Military and Emergency Services Health Australia
- Minister and Defence Spouse Round Table
- Minister Chester
- National Centre for Veterans' Healthcare, Concord
- National Commissioner for Defence and Veteran Suicide Prevention Roundtable
- National Commissioner for Defence and Veteran Suicide Prevention Symposium
- Office for Veterans QLD
- Open Arms - Community Engagement Team Consultation
- Open Arms - National Advisory Committee Meeting
- Open Arms - Regional Advisory Committee Forum
- Phoenix Australia
- Poppy Tributes
- Prince's Trust Australia
- Ramsay Health Care
- Remembrance Day, Australian War Memorial
- Rotary Club
- Royal Commission Terms of Reference - Female Veterans & Families Consultation
- Ruth Clare
- SASR Association and Trust
- Senator Jacqui Lambie
- Soldier On
- Sonder
- St John of God Psychological Trauma Project
- TAPS USA
- The Uncharted Leader
- TPI Federation

- Veteran Family Advocate Workshop
- Veteran Sports Australia
- Veterans' Wellbeing Centre Meeting
- Veterans' Wellbeing Taskforce
- Veterans Advisory Council of SA
- Veterans Branch VIC
- Veterans' Family Policy Planning Day
- Veterans' Issues WA
- Veterans' Review Board Member Briefing Session
- Voice Of A Veteran
- Wandering Warriors
- War Widows' Guild SA

Please note this does not include a full comprehensive list due to the number of engagements and for privacy reasons, Veteran and families details have not been disclosed.