



Australian Government
Department of Veterans' Affairs

**A MESSAGE FROM YOUR DVA DEPUTY COMMISSIONER
MS LEANNE CAMERON**

MAY 2017

IMPROVING SERVICES FOR VETERANS

DVA is undergoing a transformation to change the way it does business. Through this transformation, DVA clients will receive a better level of support based on their needs and expectations, rather than our complicated legislation and systems.

Improving the Transition Process

Improving the transition process to civilian life for Australian Defence Force (ADF) personnel is a high priority for the Government. DVA has committed to examine the transition experience, in collaboration with the Department of Defence (Defence) and the Commonwealth Superannuation Corporation (CSC), to assist transitioning ADF members with arrangements before they separate from the ADF, including their health care and financial support or employment.

The aim is to help ADF members to easily transition to productive, successful civilian lives within a short period of time after leaving the ADF. To and in line with the Government's 2016 election commitment to create a better veterans' transition process, DVA, CSC, and Defence have established the Transition Taskforce.

The Taskforce will consult with current and former ADF members, ex-service organisations and other organisations that offer services or support for transition. DVA and Defence staff involved with the policy and administration of transition will also be consulted.

The feedback and information collected from this consultation will assist the Taskforce in reporting back to the relevant ministers on the barriers to effective transition and suggestions to overcome them.

In addition to the Taskforce, a Discharge (Separation) with Documentation policy is being implemented by Defence. In the first instance, this policy has mandated Individual Transition Plans and Separation Checklists for all separating ADF members.

The Digital Readiness Act

The recent passing of the Digital Readiness Bill through Parliament will allow DVA to implement computerised decision making. DVA will use these provisions only in situations where no human interpretation or discretion is required as DVA continues to modernise its IT systems. Improving computer systems and programs for the Department will mean that in the future veterans will see the benefits of this reform through faster processing times.

This new legislation ensures that if an automated adverse liability decision is made (where injury, disease, aggravation or death is related to service), it must be referred to a DVA staff member for consideration and determination.

Changes to improve the information sharing capabilities between DVA and the Department of Defence should also help improve processing of claims and wait times, with DVA now having greater access to relevant claim information.

Following consultation undertaken by the Minister for Veterans' Affairs, and the need for the Bill to pass for DVA to start implementing these important measures, the previous Public Interest Disclosure provisions were removed.

MyService trial

As part of its transformation, DVA is trialling a new online portal called MyService, which aims to make it faster and easier for you to request cover. For the purpose of the trial, MyService uses the terminology 'cover' instead of 'claim'.

If you enlisted in the ADF after 30 June 2004 and you wish to be covered by DVA for a service related condition, you can register your request for cover through the MyService portal.

MyService is now available on the DVA website at www.dva.gov.au/myservice.

To access MyService, you will need your PMKeys number, date of enlistment and either your current driver's licence or Medicare card. You will also need a medical diagnosis and any related documents to support your request for cover.

MyService allows you to electronically verify yourself, so you don't have to complete the current paper-based proof of identity process. You can then request cover for an illness or injury related to your ADF service and upload your diagnosis and any related documents. You will also be asked for feedback to help DVA improve the experience for clients.

If you need more information, want to provide feedback or need assistance help using MyService, please contact MyServiceSupport@dva.gov.au.

If you are eligible to request cover, we encourage you to take part in the trial.

Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation (Defence-related Claims) Act

In order to ensure that the unique nature of military service continues to be recognised appropriately, the Government introduced a Bill to Parliament last year to create a standalone version of the *Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 1988* (SRCA) for current and former Australian Defence Force (ADF) members with service prior to 1 July 2004.

If passed by the Parliament, this Act will be titled the *Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation (Defence-related Claims) Act 1988* (DRCA).

The DRCA will replicate the SRCA. At commencement, eligibility and benefits under the DRCA will be the same as those presently available to current and former ADF members under the existing SRCA.

The Bill also ensures that, at commencement, entitlements being received by DVA clients under previous versions and iterations of the SRCA are preserved.

Subject to passage of the Bill, the commencement date of the DRCA is expected to be 1 July 2017.

Protecting your confidentiality and privacy

Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service (VVCS) is committed to preserving and upholding your rights to confidentiality and privacy.

VVCS records are stored securely and every effort is made to ensure that your counselling sessions and contact with VVCS are confidential. VVCS keeps confidential notes and reports on your counselling and group program attendance so we can provide you with appropriate professional help and for planning and evaluation purposes.

Your clinical information will not be released to the Department of Veterans' Affairs, other government agencies or external parties without your consent, unless there are exceptional circumstances where information may have to be released in accordance with the law. This would only occur where your safety or the safety of others is at serious risk, in serious criminal matters, or in response to a court direction.

If you are a member of the Australian Defence Force (ADF) and you have been referred through the ADF Agreement for Services, VVCS is required to provide periodic reports regarding your treatment to the ADF Referring Authority.

VVCS are bound by the Privacy Act 1988 and the Australian Privacy Principles (APPs). See more information on how VVCS manages personal information at www.vvcs.gov.au or email vvcs@dva.gov.au and request a copy of the Privacy Policy.

Veteran Suicide Prevention Project

Northern Queensland Primary Health Network (NQPHN) is driving forward action on veteran suicide prevention after appointing a Veteran Suicide Prevention Project Manager in Townsville.

The successful applicant, who was previously a member of the Australian Defence Force (ADF) will be responsible for the scoping, implementation, and evaluation of a pilot suicide prevention trial in the Townsville region, targeting veteran ADF members and their families.

The newly-developed role will work closely with local stakeholders to develop localised suicide prevention and intervention plans reflective of the local need.

This will include coordinating the activities of the project, informed by the project's four working groups and steering committee, of which NQPHN is now looking to secure members.

NQPHN also invites ex-ADF personnel and service providers to join project's working groups and steering committee

"We're seeking expressions of interest for people who would like to play a key role in helping to address the issue of veteran suicide in the region," said NQPHN Chief Executive Officer Robin Moore.

"This is a unique opportunity to be actively involved with the implementation of this project, and ensure that the outcomes remain focused and prioritised to the needs of ex-ADF members and their families at risk of self-harm or suicide."

NQPHN is particularly requesting expressions of interest from the following groups of people:

- an ex-ADF service member with a lived experience of mental health issues
- an ex-ADF member medically discharged
- an ex-ADF member who has voluntarily discharged
- an ex-ADF member who has been administratively discharged
- an ex-ADF member (with or without operational service)
- a carer of an ex-ADF member with a lived experience of mental health issues
- a service provider who provides services to ex-ADF members, carers or families
- a mental health service provider.

Anyone who would like to express their interest in joining these groups should submit their application to mentalhealth@primaryhealth.com.au by 4pm on 9 June 2017. Expression of Interest guidelines are also available by emailing mentalhealth@primaryhealth.com.au

Mr Moore said the new project manager role is a key step in starting to address the concerning statistics regarding veteran mental health issues.

“We know the devastating impact that suicide has on North Queensland communities, individuals, families and carers, and we’re determined to work with local mental health service providers to help prevent suicide and suicidal behaviour,” he said.

“This new role will work closely with key local stakeholders to find out what services are out there, and what we can do better to support ADF personnel and their families while they serve, and when they transition to civilian life and beyond.

“We believe Townsville is the perfect site for the first suicide prevention trial site, with Lavarack Barracks being the largest Australian Army base, undertaking mission rehearsal exercises prior to deployment.”

This need for action came after data demonstrated that the suicide rate for ex-service personnel (men) is 13 per cent higher than the general population when based on age.

NQPHN’s 2016 Health Needs Assessment also highlighted that its region’s suicide rate is one-and-a-half times the national suicide rate.

The Turnbull Government announced the suicide prevention trial in Townsville last year as part of a \$34 million commitment to fund and evaluate 12 suicide prevention trial sites nationally.

The Townsville trial, led by NQPHN, will bring together the best evidence-based strategies and models to better target people at risk of suicide, and ensure a more integrated, regionally-based approach to suicide prevention.