

AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL VETERANS ARTS MUSEUM

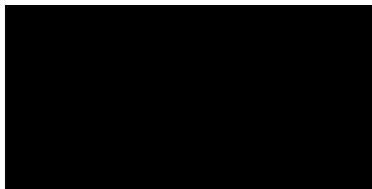
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7 March 2025

The Australian National Veterans Arts Museum (ANVAM) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the draft Defence and Veterans Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy. The enclosed submission addresses ANVAM's key points of feedback to Defence and the Department of Veterans Affairs in order to assist in the approach to implementing the strategy.

ANVAM welcomes any questions in relation to this submission and the recommendations.

Yours sincerely,



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PATRON-IN-CHIEF
HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE MS SAM MOSTYN AC
GOVERNOR GENERAL OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

ANVAM Submission: Defence and Veterans Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy

The *Australian National Veterans Arts Museum* (ANVAM) is Australia's only veteran-led charity whose primary purpose is to support the physical, social and mental health and wellbeing of the Veteran Community through the arts. Established in 2013, ANVAM has established a strong reputation and record of achievement in supporting the mental health and wellbeing of the Veteran Community, which is inclusive of all current and ex-serving members of the ADF, and families.

ANVAM makes the following recommendations focused on the cost effective implementation of the Defence and Veteran Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy (Strategy), through investments in the capability of the veteran charity and ex-serving community sector.

Recommendations.

1. Government recognise that the ex-serving community, veteran charities and the ex-service organisation (ESO) sector, under the right framework, represent an essential national resilience capability toward the National Defence Strategy, which is enhanced through the investment in this Strategy designed to maintain the wellbeing of the ex-serving community.
2. Government mandate that Defence and DVA prioritise sourcing 'wellbeing services' from the veteran charitable sector in order to improve the return on investment for the limited funding available and to build capability and capacity in this sector in support of the National Resilience outcome.
3. Defence and DVA undertake a services mapping review to identify what veteran charities and ESO's are providing what services, and partner with the leading organisations in respective service areas able to demonstrate the broadest reach in their service model in order to develop this sector into a robust National Resilience capability.
4. Defence and DVA formally partner with ANVAM is the sole service provider of arts and creative based services for the Veteran Community in order to build the capability and capacity in ANVAM to deliver increased value for money through its model of investing in the Veteran Community and to enhance the quality of its services for the cost effective benefits of the outcomes sought in the strategy.
5. The Government, under the Land Acquisition Act, appoint ANVAM Trustee of the unused Commonwealth property at 310 St Kilda Rd, as ANVAM's permanent headquarters in order to build ANVAM's capacity to deliver its arts based mental health and wellbeing services to the Veteran Community, and develop its capability as an institution supporting Australia's National Resilience and National Defence capability.

Submission.

The *Australian National Veterans Arts Museum* (ANVAM) is a veteran-led charity whose primary purpose is to support the physical, social and mental health and wellbeing of the Veteran Community through the arts. The Veteran Community is inclusive of all current and ex-serving members of the ADF, and families.

ANVAM was established in 2013, and incorporated in 2015, as an inclusive arts and cultural institution for the Veteran Community. ANVAM remains unique in its model, approach and outcomes all closely aligned to the Defence and Veteran Community Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy (Strategy).

ANVAM's breadth of focus, by design, extends across the whole-of-life context supporting the Veteran Community based on their needs, including where individuals and families of the community may be located in Australia or internationally.

By ANVAM's nature, and by design, ANVAM's model is geared towards wellbeing through prevention and early intervention. ANVAM is also well attuned to the need for intervention to support members of the community through periods of poor physical, social and mental health. These two can, and under ANVAM's model do, co-exist. Indeed by the very nature of ANVAM's model that emphasises the role of community, collaboration, self-agency and identity, the place of prevention and early intervention can and does support interventions for those experiencing, or recovering from, periods of poor mental health. In this context, the role of community charitable organisations cannot be overstated.

ANVAM's work has, and continues to be, at the leading edge of thought leadership and the delivery of innovative programs and services across the Veteran Community. Between 2011-15 during ANVAM's foundational period the concept of wellbeing in Defence and Veteran Communities was all but absent, and yet ANVAM's constitution upon incorporation in 2015 focused on this dimensions of the Veteran Community.

ANVAM continues in a thought leadership capacity to this day, including the delivery of the most inclusive event ever across the Defence and Veteran Community, the Festival Of Veterans Arts (FOVA), 21-30 March 2025, while also offering insights and recommendations to further create opportunities to enhance the wellbeing and quality of life of those in the Veteran Community. These recommendations are included in this submission, which are broadly focused on implementation of the strategy.

Further, ANVAM's work has illuminated the connection facilitated arts engagement plays in supporting the capability edge of the Australian Defence Force (ADF) through the ADF's people capability. Following the release of the National Defence Strategy (NDS) in 2024, ANVAM took this further to highlight the role of the ex-serving community in enhancing Australia's National Resilience. ANVAM recommends that the Government sustain the capability inherent in the ex-serving community through prioritising investments in healthcare and social connection programs, including those provided by ANVAM, while also prioritising procurement from the veteran's charitable sector as direct investments in outcomes including the wellbeing of veterans per the Strategy.

The Strategy's forward includes a note as follows:

Narrative will include the National Defence Strategy requirements and the government response to the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide Final Report.

ANVAM has looked closely at the National Defence Strategy (NDS) in this context of ANVAM's work with the Veteran Community. The NDS makes the point that *Australia faces its most complex and challenging strategic environment since the Second World War.*

This strategic environment has precipitated one of the largest modernisation programs for the Australian Defence Force (ADF) in 80 years.

The NDS also states that *People are Defence's most important asset.* The development of the *Defence and Veterans Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy*, as well as other documents including the *Defence Cultural Blueprint* and *Defence Workforce Plan* point to considerable thought being given to supporting this critical asset in delivering Australia's National Defence.

The 'asset' that has been overlooked in the context of the NDS is the ex-serving community. i.e. those former members of the ADF who have the training necessary to be employable in the ADF, and therefore whose skills, cultural understanding and awareness and the relationships to be an invaluable resource base, i.e. an asset, able to be called upon to support Australia's National Defence and National Resilience in the NDS.

<p>Recommendation. Government recognise that the ex-serving community, veteran charities and the ex-service organisation (ESO) sector, under the right framework, represent an essential national resilience capability toward the National Defence Strategy, which is enhanced through the investment in this Strategy designed to maintain the wellbeing of the ex-serving community.</p>
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The strategy is an opportunity to acknowledge that this asset exists, and that this asset does, in fact, have a potential role to play in Australia's National Resilience as described in the NDS.

ANVAM has already structured its thinking to orient towards this reality where every former ADF member has the potential to contribute to Australia's National Resilience, if through no other means than in ANVAM's structure and programs of support in times of crisis.

Under this mindset and approach, it becomes clearer that the implementation of the strategy warrants a holistic approach whereby the services provided to the Veteran Community should be sourced from the Veteran (charity) Community. This approach creates an ecosystem in which the procurement of services is an investment in the capacity and capability of the veteran charity sector, in which charitable organisations are able to:

- recruit from the Veteran Community thus provide employment and income
- retain former ADF members within the community this provide connection

- train employees to deliver the services thus providing education and skills
- improve the quality of services, capacity and capability of organisations thus providing a ready capability in the event the ADF is called upon for a significant conflict, or for other purpose in support of National Resilience
- foster an ecosystem in which every procurement dollar sourcing services delivers a multiplier effect well above and beyond the same dollar for the same service from a commercial / non-veteran organisation or provider due to factors including veterans employment, expanded service delivery, National Resilience building.

Recommendation. Government mandate that Defence and DVA prioritise sourcing 'wellbeing services' from the veteran charitable sector in order to improve the return on investment for the limited funding available and to build capability and capacity in this sector in support of the National Resilience outcome.

Recommendation. Defence and DVA undertake a services mapping review to identify what veteran charities and ESO's are providing what services, and partner with the leading organisations in respective service areas able to demonstrate the broadest reach in their service model in order to develop this sector into a robust National Resilience capability.

ANVAM is the lead veterans charity in Australia in the area of its focus on arts engagement for mental health and wellbeing. ANVAM has a proven history in the arts of thought leadership, program delivery, and a reputation for inclusion and collaboration.

With ANVAM's close alignment to the goals of the Strategy it is logical that Defence and DVA invest in a model of support that is already delivering the Strategy's outcomes.

Recommendation. Defence and DVA formally partner with ANVAM is the sole service provider of arts and creative based services for the Veteran Community in order to build the capability and capacity in ANVAM to deliver increased value for money through its model of investing in the Veteran Community and to enhance the quality of its services for the cost effective benefits of the outcomes sought in the strategy.

As part of its model of support, ANVAM has long sought to occupy a Commonwealth building built for the wellbeing of the Veteran Community, and yet has not been used for 30 years. ANVAM's current address is literally next door to this building, and thus created a strong connection across the Veteran Community to this area as the creative and cultural heart of the Veteran Community.

Recognising that Government's investment in the NDS is a priority, ANVAM has provided a paper to Government, Defence and DVA making the business case linking ANVAM's proposed use of this building to the NDS, and to the outcomes of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide. ANVAM now makes the case that its use of this building directly relates to the delivery of this Strategy. This case is especially strong under each of the tasks of Goal 4 of the Strategy.

Recommendation. The Government, under the Land Acquisition Act, appoint ANVAM Trustee of the unused Commonwealth property at 310 St Kilda Rd, as

ANVAM's permanent headquarters in order to build ANVAM's capacity to deliver its arts based mental health and wellbeing services to the Veteran Community, and develop its capability as an institution supporting Australia's National Resilience and National Defence capability