



Australian Government

Department of Defence

Department of Veterans' Affairs

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING ACTION PLAN



This document includes information about mental health, bereavement and suicide that readers may find distressing. If you need to talk to someone, the following organisations can help:

Open Arms

Open Arms is the leading provider of free mental health assessment and counselling for Defence members, veterans and families. They offer both individual and relationship counselling to help build strong and healthy relationships at all stages of family life.

 1800 011 046

 openarms.gov.au

Defence Member and Family Helpline

The Helpline is available 24/7 to assist Defence members and families. The Helpline provides assessment, advice, assistance or referral depending on the needs of the Defence member and their family.

 1800 624 608

 defence.gov.au/adf-members-families/crisis-support/helplines/defence-member-family-helpline

ADF Chaplains

Chaplains provide pastoral, spiritual, religious and welfare support.

 1300 333 362

 defence.gov.au/adf-members-families/crisis-support/helplines/chaplaincy-services

ADF Mental Health All Hours Support Line

Mental health and wellbeing advice for Defence members and families.

 1800 628 036

 defence.gov.au/adf-members-families/crisis-support/helplines/all-hours-support-line

13 YARN

13YARN is the national crisis support line for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are feeling overwhelmed or having difficulty coping.

 13 92 76

 13yarn.org.au

1800 IMSICK

1800 IMSICK is a national 24/7 nurse triage and health support line for Defence members if they become ill or injured after hours or are not near a Defence health facility.

 1800 467 425

 defence.gov.au/adf-members-families/health-well-being/services-support-fighting-fit/1800-imsick

1800 VETERAN

1800 VETERAN is Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA's) general phone number. It is available between 8am to 5pm, Monday to Friday. It's a way of finding out about the wealth of support offered by DVA.

 1800 838 372

 dva.gov.au

1800 RESPECT

1800 RESPECT is the national Sexual Assault, Domestic and Family Violence Counselling Service for anyone living in Australia. The service provides telephone and online crisis and trauma counselling.

 1800 737 732

 1800respect.org.au

Kids Helpline

Kids Helpline is a free, and anonymous 24/7 telephone and online counselling service specifically for young people 5–25 years old.

 1800 551 800

 kidshelpline.com.au

Lifeline

Lifeline is a national 24-hour support line, which provides crisis support and mental health services.

 131 114

 lifeline.org.au

Mensline Australia

Mensline Australia is a national 24/7 service for men, providing support, information, or referral by telephone or online.

 1300 789 978

 mensline.org.au

Relationships Australia

Relationships Australia offers counselling, family dispute resolution, mediation, and a range of family and community support and education programs.

 1300 364 277

 relationships.org.au

Suicide Call Back Service

Suicide Call Back Service offers free professional 24/7 telephone counselling support to people at risk of suicide, concerned about someone at risk, bereaved by suicide and people experiencing emotional or mental health issues.

 1300 659 467

 suicidecallbackservice.org.au

The Family Relationship Advice Line

The Family Relationship Advice Line helps families affected by relationship or separation issues, including information on parenting arrangements after separation. It can also refer callers to local services that provide assistance.

 1800 050 321

 familyrelationships.gov.au/talk-someone/advice-line

Acknowledgements

The Department of Defence and the Department of Veterans' Affairs acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia. We recognise their continuing connection to traditional lands and waters and would like to pay respect to their Elders both past and present. We would also like to pay respect to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have contributed to the defence of Australia in times of peace and war.

We acknowledge and honour those who have served or are currently serving in the Australian Defence Force. We pay our respects to their families and loved ones.





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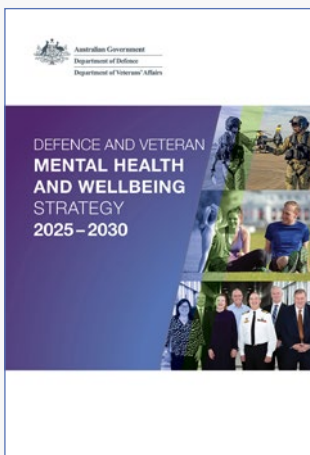
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The strategy for mental health and wellbeing

The *Defence and Veteran Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2025–2030* is jointly managed by the Department of Defence (Defence) and the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA). The strategy's vision is:

Members of the Defence and veteran community are empowered and supported for optimal mental health and wellbeing during service or employment, during transition to civilian life and beyond.

The strategy's goals are:



Goal 1. Promote and assist wellbeing

Goal 2. Improve mental health and wellbeing through prevention and early intervention

Goal 3. Facilitate timely access to quality care and support

Goal 4. Grow a positive and connected Defence and veteran community

Goal 5. Prioritise suicide prevention initiatives

Goal 6. Use evidence and data to drive positive outcomes.

Alignment to Australian frameworks and research

The strategy embraces a life course approach. This honours the service and dedication of the Defence and veteran community. It aligns with best practice frameworks, research and recommendations for mental health, wellbeing and suicide prevention. This includes guidance from the National Mental Health Commission, the Productivity Commission and the *Australian Government Response to the Final Report of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide*.

In addition to early intervention and comprehensive care, the strategy and action plans guide promotion and prevention opportunities across the Defence and veteran community. They also prioritise wellbeing along the Defence and veteran journey.

Action plans

Defence and DVA have two interdepartmental action plans under the strategy. These set out our program of work to achieve the strategy outcomes. The action plans are:

- *Mental Health and Wellbeing Action Plan*
- *Suicide Prevention Action Plan.*

These action plans have been developed together. They provide a linked and systemic approach to wellbeing, mental health and suicide prevention for the Defence and veteran community.

The *Mental Health and Wellbeing Action Plan* focuses on goals 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6 of the strategy. It also contributes to suicide prevention outcomes through promotion of wellbeing, prevention of harm, reduction of stigma, and improved support. The *Suicide Prevention Action Plan* focuses on goals 5 and 6 of the strategy. Each plan has both joint and departmental actions.

The strategy and its initiatives will be monitored and evaluated using a monitoring and evaluation framework. They will be actively managed and updated to ensure Defence and DVA can respond to emergent evidence and the needs of the Defence and veteran community.

These action plans are iterative. They set out the actions Defence and DVA will initially take to deliver the goals of this strategy. The actions outlined in these action plans are subject to change in line with findings from the strategy's *monitoring and evaluation framework* and achievement of outcomes over the course of the strategy.



The plan for mental health and wellbeing

The approach

This *Mental Health and Wellbeing Action Plan* outlines the approach to mental health and wellbeing at individual, organisational and community levels. It promotes an evidence-based, outcomes-focused, systems approach to mental health and wellbeing. It is underpinned by lived experience and compassion, and it focuses on promotion, prevention, support and social connection.

The plan aligns with key Australian frameworks, research and initiatives for mental health, wellbeing and suicide prevention. The *Mental Health and Wellbeing Action Plan* operates across the wellbeing factors (see Figure 1) to improve mental health, wellbeing and suicide prevention.



Figure 1: Wellbeing factors.

Guiding principles

Our actions will be guided by the following principles:



Wellbeing and capability. Aligning the sustainable wellbeing of the Defence and veteran community with the capability needs for the defence of Australia and the national interest. This will help our people to join well, serve and work well, live well and age well.



Person-centred. Respecting and responsive to the preferences, needs and values of the Defence and veteran community.



Trauma-informed and compassionate. Recognising the impact of trauma. Providing compassionate responses that prioritise safety and empowerment.



Coordinated and holistic. Continuing to build our joint capability to address the social determinants of mental health and wellbeing.



Partnering with lived experience. Partnering with those with lived experience to design, deliver and continuously improve mental health, wellbeing and suicide prevention.



Continuous improvement. Seeking improvement through evidence, monitoring, evaluation and insights, enhancing benefits for the Defence and veteran community.

Language matters

This plan aims to be inclusive and respectful. Given the plan's diverse audience, we have used plain English and the [Mindframe guidelines](https://mindframe.org.au/suicide/communicating-about-suicide/mindframe-guidelines)¹ for communication where possible.

Monitoring and evaluation

The strategy's *monitoring and evaluation framework* describes the outcomes the strategy is expected to achieve. It provides an overview of planned monitoring and evaluation activities for the strategy, and associated initiatives.

Monitoring and evaluating the initiatives under the strategy will help us to understand progress towards the intended outcomes of the strategy. The results will also help us understand the change we are making for the Defence and veteran community.

¹ <https://mindframe.org.au/suicide/communicating-about-suicide/mindframe-guidelines>

The actions

Defence and DVA have jointly developed the *Mental Health and Wellbeing Action Plan* and the *Suicide Prevention Action Plan*.

These actions are designed to complement and build on the related work of the following strategic documents:

- *National Defence Strategy 2024*
- *Defence Workforce Plan 2024*
- *Defence Culture Strategy: Defence Culture Blueprint 2023*
- *Defence Work Health and Safety Strategy 2023–2028*
- *Defence and Veteran Family Wellbeing Strategy 2025–2030*
- *Veteran Transition Strategy 2023*
- *National Suicide Prevention Strategy 2025–2035*
- *Australian Government Response to the Final Report of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide.*

Together, the work undertaken by Defence and DVA builds a systemic approach to wellbeing, mental health and suicide prevention for the Defence and veteran community, delivering the strategy.



Goal 1: Promote and assist wellbeing

To deliver the strategy's Goal 1, we will embed wellbeing and improve culture. We will promote wellbeing, health promotion and education; change policy to drive reform; and build physical, social, emotional and spiritual skills, connections and health.

Objective 1.1 Fostering individual and collective wellbeing through a positive culture and the aligned wellbeing factors

ID	Action	Lead
1.1.1	Improve wellbeing skills and capability for Defence personnel from commencement and across their careers.	Defence
1.1.2	Explore improvements for career development and management of personnel to promote mental health and wellbeing.	Defence
1.1.3	Review opportunities to improve approaches to peer support and mentoring across the Defence workforce.	Defence
1.1.4	Deliver programs to fund home-based supports to enhance recovery and functionality for veterans with service-related injuries.	DVA

Objective 1.2 Providing a preventive and holistic approach to mental health and wellbeing

ID	Action	Lead
1.2.1	Improve opportunities to integrate wellbeing into Defence policies, procedures and decision-making to build a sustainable culture for Defence capability.	Defence
1.2.2	Improve psychosocial hazard management. This includes work design, fatigue management, and job demands for sustainable preparedness and capability.	Defence
1.2.3	Review and improve approaches to working in remote, regional and international locations.	Defence
1.2.4	Collaborate with government and community partners to provide assistance for veterans and families experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness.	DVA
1.2.5	Enhance veteran community awareness of alcohol and other drug related treatment to support veterans with substance issues.	DVA
1.2.6	Provide veteran housing initiatives to support veteran and family wellbeing.	DVA

Objective 1.3 Providing initiatives, programs and services that build physical, social, emotional and spiritual skills and connections

ID	Action	Lead
1.3.1	Improve education, health promotion, and access to health and wellbeing programs for physical, social, emotional and spiritual health.	Defence
1.3.2	Promote existing online mental health programs that support veterans to build emotional and social connections, particularly for veterans and families in rural and remote areas.	DVA
1.3.3	Deliver a veteran hearing services framework that includes access to audiology assessments and management of hearing loss for eligible veterans.	DVA
1.3.4	Promote activities that increase community awareness of veteran and family wellbeing.	DVA
1.3.5	Deliver health programs that promote preventative health education and activities to support the management of chronic conditions for veterans.	DVA



Goal 2: Improve mental health and wellbeing through prevention and early intervention

To deliver the strategy's Goal 2, we will build a culture that supports help-seeking and help-offering. We will also support people towards positive mental health and wellbeing. This will include efforts to address stigma.

Objective 2.1 Building the ability of individuals to identify when they or others are struggling with their mental health and access the support that is available

ID	Action	Lead
2.1.1	Improve mental health capability, education and skills for Defence people, service providers and supports.	Defence
2.1.2	Support a preventative approach to veteran health care by delivering Veterans' Health Check that includes access to comprehensive assessments by a general practitioner and follow-up care.	DVA
2.1.3	Develop and implement communication strategies to increase awareness of existing and future services and supports.	DVA

Objective 2.2 Working with individuals and teams to support people to the well end of the mental health and wellbeing continuum

ID	Action	Lead
2.2.1	Improve understanding of protective factors for mental health and wellbeing, their relationship to risk factors and their impact on capability.	Defence
2.2.2	Review approaches to improve wellbeing for Defence personnel and families pre-deployment, in theatre, post-deployment, during exercises and throughout their careers.	Defence
2.2.3	Review programs and initiatives to support people experiencing challenging life events that impact wellbeing towards positive health and wellbeing.	Defence
2.2.4	Progress the Veterans' Chaplaincy Program to 30 June 2026, which will include the development of connections to clinical and non-clinical supports, and work on moral injury.	DVA
2.2.5	Continue to deliver the Psychiatric Assistance Dog program as an adjunct therapy for veterans experiencing post traumatic stress disorder.	DVA
2.2.6	Assist veterans through DVA's Rehabilitation Program to maximise their wellbeing by supporting achievement of medical management, psychosocial and vocational goals.	DVA

Objective 2.3 Building a culture through education and change that supports people to feel comfortable in asking for help and accessing the support they need

ID	Action	Lead
2.3.1	Review and improve approaches to help-seeking in Defence to foster wellbeing.	Defence
2.3.2	Implement and improve approaches to prevention and management of vicarious and secondary trauma.	Defence
2.3.3	Review options to improve access to early intervention mental health services and initiatives.	Defence
2.3.4	Improve Defence and DVA's approach to trauma-informed care, including education and training for Defence and DVA personnel.	Defence and DVA
2.3.5	Evaluate the Defence, Veterans' and Families' Acute Support Package.	DVA



Goal 3: Facilitate timely access to quality care and support

To deliver the strategy's Goal 3, we will enhance continuity of care. We will coordinate the approach across the Defence and veteran journey to strengthen systems. We will ensure initiatives are appropriate, timely and informed by best practice. We will improve navigation of care and support pathways and consider the needs of people and family in all we do.

Objective 3.1 Enhancing continuity of care through a coordinated approach across the Defence and veteran journey

ID	Action	Lead
3.1.1	Review mental health initiatives and supports for Defence personnel to improve wellbeing.	Defence
3.1.2	Support implementation of joint actions across the <i>Veteran Transition Strategy</i> , the <i>Defence and Veteran Family Wellbeing Strategy 2025–2030</i> and the <i>Defence and Veteran Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2025–2030</i> .	Defence and DVA
3.1.3	Support veteran transition and claims lodgement through DVA's veteran support officers, who provide information and guidance on DVA provided services, programs and claims procedures.	DVA
3.1.4	Provide case management to assist veterans and families who require additional support due to risk, vulnerability and complexity factors.	DVA
3.1.5	Provide access to evidence-based mental health treatments including emerging and adjunct treatments not currently funded by the Australian Government under universal healthcare arrangements.	DVA

Objective 3.2 Strengthening our systems to ensure initiatives, programs and services are appropriate, delivered at the right time and right place, and informed by best practice

ID	Action	Lead
3.2.1	Review and foster effective partnerships between mental health services, healthcare providers and community organisations to improve service outcomes.	Defence
3.2.2	Amend the types of mental health providers available to deliver mental health services to eligible Open Arms clients.	DVA
3.2.3	Continue to develop a DVA services guide to provide accessible, up-to-date and accurate information about Defence and DVA payments and services, other government agencies and wider community supports.	DVA
3.2.4	Continue working to strengthen and enhance advocacy support services to benefit veterans and families.	DVA
3.2.5	Provide access to high-quality medical and allied health treatment for veterans and eligible dependents through DVA Veteran Card arrangements.	DVA
3.2.6	Continue to provide military-aware and trauma-informed mental health, counselling and wellbeing support services to anyone who has served in the Australian Defence Force (current and former serving members) and their immediate families from Open Arms.	DVA

Objective 3.3 Improve the education and capability of commanders and managers to support mental health and wellbeing

ID	Action	Lead
3.3.1	Promote the skills and capability of commanders and managers to invest in the mental health and wellbeing of their people.	Defence



Objective 3.4 Empowering self-agency in navigating the care and support pathways

ID	Action	Lead
3.4.1	Review and improve care and support pathways for Defence personnel and families, with a focus on empowering self-agency, ease of navigation and continuity of care.	Defence
3.4.2	Provide targeted communications on resources available during and post-service to support veterans with their transition into civilian life.	DVA
3.4.3	Make it easier for veterans to establish a MyService account and activate a Veteran White Card and eligibility to non-liability healthcare mental health treatment through the early engagement model and DVA's veteran support officers.	DVA

Objective 3.5 Considering the family when developing and managing care and support pathways

ID	Action	Lead
3.5.1	Review and improve supports for families and people supporting the Defence and veteran community.	Defence
3.5.2	Coordinate support for bereaved families of veterans through bereavement entitlements, ensuring timely access to counselling, financial assistance and advocacy.	DVA
3.5.3	Continue to provide short-term, flexible support to eligible veterans and families through the Defence, Veterans' and Families Acute Support Package.	DVA
3.5.4	Provide eligible students with access to financial assistance and supports to help them to reach their potential.	DVA

Objective 3.6 Supporting rehabilitation after injury and illness so personnel can continue to work in Defence or, where this is not possible, can transition to post-service civilian life

ID	Action	Lead
3.6.1	Review rehabilitation programs and supports for Defence personnel. This includes review of barriers to and enablers of access to effective support.	Defence
3.6.2	Provide access to a range of evidence-based clinical care options for trauma recovery.	DVA



Goal 4: Grow a positive and connected Defence and veteran community

Meaningful connections are vital for wellbeing. Growing community connections within Defence and with civilian communities will help the Defence and veteran community. It will also help civilian communities to understand the work we do, the needs of our people and the value they continue to provide to the Australian community.

Objective 4.1 Promote the value of military service (past, present and future) across the Australian population

ID	Action	Lead
4.1.1	Foster the value of military service across the Australian community, building recognition, connectedness and respect for Defence members, families and veterans.	Defence and DVA

Objective 4.2 Promote the positive aspects of service and domain-specific cultures

ID	Action	Lead
4.2.1	Review and improve opportunities to foster service culture and service connections across the Defence and veteran community.	Defence
4.2.2	Improve wellbeing for sustainable, high-performing teams in Defence.	Defence
4.2.3	Explore initiatives to target at-risk wellbeing factors, including finances, relationships, housing, identity, health, employment, justice, recognition and social connection.	Defence
4.2.4	Provide resources to educate employers, veterans and families about the skills and value that veteran families can bring to their organisations. Recognise, celebrate and promote partner achievements in civilian employment.	DVA

Objective 4.3 Manage positive connections through respect, reward and recognition

ID	Action	Lead
4.3.1	Support community-based organisations through grants and funding, enabling them to run programs that help veterans and their families engage with the wider community.	DVA

Objective 4.4 Assist serving members, veterans and families to maintain connections among each other and with the broader community

ID	Action	Lead
4.4.1	Review opportunities to improve connectedness among Defence members, their families and the broader community throughout careers and ongoing in civilian life.	Defence
4.4.2	Explore opportunities to increase engagement with wellbeing hubs for veterans and families.	Defence and DVA
4.4.3	Continue to promote and facilitate the Open Arms program, Stepping Out, which supports the transition from military to civilian life, blending educational and skill-building approaches.	DVA

Objective 4.5 Strengthen connections among Defence, DVA, other government departments, ex-service organisations and community organisations to improve wellbeing outcomes

ID	Action	Lead
4.5.1	Review opportunities to improve collaboration with wellbeing and suicide prevention services and other stakeholders to improve mental health and wellbeing outcomes.	Defence
4.5.2	Improve secure, ethical data sharing opportunities among Defence, DVA and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.	Defence
4.5.3	Strengthen the strategic partnership by refreshing the agreement for service between Defence and DVA.	Defence and DVA
4.5.4	Partner with Commonwealth departments, state and territory governments to enhance access to mental health services for veterans and families.	DVA
4.5.5	Increase awareness of Open Arms services through enhanced access to mental health services pathway.	DVA

Objective 4.6 Assist veterans and families to build and maintain connection with each other post service

ID	Action	Lead
4.6.1	Promote community development, education and health promotion activities through the community support advisor role.	DVA
4.6.2	Implement the <i>Veteran Transition Strategy Action Plan</i> to improve the transition experience for military personnel moving into civilian life.	DVA

Goal 5: Prioritise suicide prevention initiatives

Our *Suicide Prevention Action Plan* provides actions related to prioritising suicide prevention initiatives. These initiatives have been designed alongside this *Mental Health and Wellbeing Action Plan* to build a systemic approach to wellbeing, mental health and suicide prevention for the Defence and veteran community.



Goal 6: Use evidence and data to drive positive outcomes

Improving our use of evidence and data will have benefits for Defence, DVA and the Defence and veteran community. It will help with the optimisation of human performance and enable informed decision-making. It will support the design of mental health and wellbeing initiatives, programs and services.

Objective 6.1 Investing in and expanding our research and evaluation to maintain high standards and best practice

ID	Action	Lead
6.1.1	Build strategic research priorities to inform mental health, wellbeing and suicide prevention initiatives.	Defence and DVA
6.1.2	Optimise the use of data for monitoring progress against outcomes for veterans at the population level through data linkage initiatives.	DVA
6.1.3	Evaluate the outcomes of the <i>DVA Family and Domestic Violence Strategy 2020–2025</i> and use findings to develop a new strategy.	DVA

Objective 6.2 Ensuring current programs and services are meeting the needs of individuals and communities through engagement, high quality data and evaluation alongside the Australian Centre for Evaluation

ID	Action	Lead
6.2.1	Review and build stakeholder partnerships and engagement to inform strategic approaches to improve wellbeing for the Defence and veteran community.	Defence
6.2.2	Enhance data collection, management and inter-agency sharing, to understand and inform mental health and wellbeing.	Defence
6.2.3	Increase consultation opportunities with veterans and families, across a range of fora, to better understand their needs.	DVA
6.2.4	Implement the Veteran and Family – Learning and Innovation Network of Knowledge (VF-LINK) to improve DVA's evidence-based approach to future policy and program design.	DVA

Objective 6.3 Using engagement, high-quality data and evaluation so programs and services contribute to positive outcomes for the Defence and veteran community

ID	Action	Lead
6.3.1	Implement the <i>Defence and Veteran Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2025–2030 Monitoring and Evaluation Framework</i> to measure and evaluate outcomes from the strategy to better inform future policy and program design.	Defence and DVA
6.3.2	Integrate data analytic approaches to improve understanding of the preferences of veterans, their behaviours and needs when accessing their entitlements and supports through DVA.	DVA
6.3.3	Improve mental health and wellbeing supports through the analysis of data using the Priority Investment Approach - Veterans Longitudinal Study.	DVA
6.3.4	Commission annual suicide monitoring to inform suicide prevention, mental health and wellbeing policies and programs for veterans.	DVA



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