

## **KSC Claims**

To Whom It May Concern,

At KSC Claims, we appreciate the opportunity to provide input on the Defence and Veteran Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2024-2029 Exposure Draft. Ensuring a comprehensive, sustainable approach to mental health and wellbeing for current and former serving personnel is critical, and advocacy plays a pivotal role in this framework.

A key consideration that we view should be integrated into the strategy is the life cycle approach to advocacy—one that acknowledges the evolving needs of veterans from enlistment, throughout their service, during their transition, and long after they have left the Australian Defence Force (ADF). Effective advocacy should not be reactive but instead proactive, supporting Defence members throughout their service and ensuring continuity of care post-transition. Many veterans experience frustration, delays, and systemic barriers when engaging with support services, contributing to poor mental health outcomes. By embedding advocacy within the broader Defence and veteran support ecosystem, we can mitigate these challenges before they escalate.

One crucial point that requires urgent attention is the introduction of advocacy services at the recruitment stage. The recruitment process is the first official point of engagement with Defence, and it provides a unique opportunity to foster relationships and build familiarity with advocacy services. By introducing advocacy early, personnel are not only made aware of their potential future entitlements and rights but can also begin to form a trust-based relationship with advocacy services, which will be invaluable when they transition to civilian life. This early engagement can ensure that veterans know where to turn for assistance, reducing the feeling of being abandoned when they leave the ADF.

Implementing advocacy services from the recruitment stage means veterans will have an ongoing, familiar point of contact throughout their careers. This proactive approach could include:

- Initial education during induction training: By educating recruits on the process of claiming entitlements, navigating mental health support, and accessing rehabilitation services from the outset, Defence personnel can have a clearer understanding of their rights and options. This early knowledge would significantly reduce the confusion and stress veterans often face when they first engage with the system post-service.
- Regular communication and relationship-building: By maintaining consistent communication throughout a Defence member's service, advocates can help build familiarity with the systems available to them, reducing barriers to access when support is most needed. This early engagement can also provide reassurance to service members that they are not alone, even as they face difficult transitions.
- Promoting awareness and trust in advocacy services: Ensuring that ADF members understand how advocacy can assist them across their career and in their post-service life, and that advocates will be there for them from their first day in the service until long after their discharge, can lead to more positive outcomes. Trust between advocates and

Defence members is key to improving the overall support experience for veterans, leading to a smoother transition into civilian life and better mental health outcomes.

This life cycle approach requires:

- Early intervention: Ensuring ADF personnel are educated on the claims and entitlements process before they transition, reducing stress and confusion when they leave service. By familiarising them with advocacy and support services early on, we can help them make informed decisions and prepare for a smoother transition to civilian life.
- Sustained engagement: Maintaining structured, high-quality advocacy services that remain available to veterans at different stages of their post-service life. From transition to retirement, continuous access to advocacy will ensure that veterans are supported through each phase of their journey. This could include transition workshops, check-ins with veterans' advocates, and access to regular information updates.
- Higher standards and regulation: Implementing clear professional standards for both free and fee-for-service advocates to ensure veterans receive consistent, reliable support tailored to their needs. Advocates must be equipped with the knowledge, resources, and training necessary to address the specific challenges that veterans face, ensuring high standards of service across the board.
- Collaboration across sectors: Advocates, mental health professionals, and policymakers should work in tandem to address systemic challenges, ensuring that claims processes do not exacerbate stress or worsen mental health outcomes. A holistic approach to support—encompassing mental health care, financial support, rehabilitation, and advocacy—will provide veterans with the comprehensive assistance they need to thrive.

Veteran wellbeing is intrinsically linked to access to fair, transparent, and timely support. Introducing advocacy early in a Defence member's career and maintaining it throughout their transition and post-service life will create a smoother and more supportive path for veterans. This life cycle approach would empower veterans, ensuring they are not left to navigate complex and often opaque processes alone, and ultimately improve their mental health and overall wellbeing.

We welcome further discussion on this matter and look forward to contributing to the continued refinement of this strategy.

Best regards,

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]