

Melbourne Legacy

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback to the Defence and Veteran Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2024-2029 Exposure Draft

The below feedback is written by Melbourne Legacy's team of professional case managers and comms experts, and on behalf of our over 4000 beneficiaries across Victoria:

General Feedback

- The Defence and Veteran Family Wellbeing Strategy includes a list of support numbers at the beginning—this should be replicated here for consistency and accessibility.
- The document is light on actual actions. Will there be a structured action plan to accompany this, similar to the one in the Defence and Veteran Family Wellbeing Strategy?

Vision

- "Defence's ability to attract, retain, and care about people..." – The word care shouldn't be an afterthought; it should be positioned earlier to reflect its importance.
- "Optimal mental health" could be reworded to lasting or strong mental health. Another option is: "Individuals are empowered to feel safe, supported, and mentally well during service."

Page 3

- Connection to other strategies is important and good to see that referenced, including the Defence and Veteran Family Wellbeing Strategy—this should be consistently referenced throughout to reinforce alignment and ensure no double up.
- "Mental health and wellbeing has a complementary relationship with organisational culture." – This phrasing feels transactional. A better approach could be:
 - "Mental health and wellbeing thrive in workplaces that prioritise a positive culture and strong safety practices."
 - OR "A supportive organisational culture and a strong focus on work health and safety create the foundation for positive mental health and wellbeing."

Page 4 – Shared Approach

- There's no mention of how families fit into this approach, nor is there consideration of ex-service organisations (ESOs). Given the impact of intergenerational trauma in multi-generational military families, collaboration with ESOs to help mitigate these effects should be highlighted.

- ESOs also provide valuable postvention insights—our "hindsight" perspective could significantly enhance proactive mental health and wellbeing strategies for serving members.

Page 7 – Post-Service Civilian Life

- The role of families should be highlighted here. Often, transitioning members start engaging with civilian healthcare systems through their family's GP, Medicare card, health insurer, dentist, etc.
- This is also the first mention of families in the document—it should come earlier. The wellbeing factors on the previous page provide an opportunity to emphasise social support and connection, particularly in relation to families.

Visual Elements

- The diagrams are excellent—both the stepped care model and the health and wellbeing continuum are clear and effective representations.

Goal 1 – Promote and Assist Wellbeing

- Greater emphasis should be placed on leveraging ESOs. Organisations like the [REDACTED] [REDACTED] should be incentivised and funded to foster community connections and a sense of purpose for veterans—something DVA and government agencies simply cannot replicate.
- [REDACTED] and similar ESOs also provide employment opportunities for veterans, reinforcing a sense of belonging within the community.

Goal 3 – Strengthening Our Systems

- Under "ensuring initiatives, programs, and services are appropriate and delivered at the right time," there is an opportunity to highlight ESOs like Legacy, which provide long-term, one-on-one support.
- Intake conversations often reveal that families are eligible for government programs and services they were never informed about. The core issue isn't eligibility—it's that information wasn't provided at the right time. This problem warrants more than a passing mention in a single bullet point.

Goal 4 – Building and Maintaining Connections

- "Assist veterans and families to build and maintain connections with each other post-service." – This should explicitly acknowledge the role of ESOs in fostering these connections.
- "Promote the value of past, present, and future military service across the Australian population." – While this is an important goal, how will it be achieved? Without clear actions, this risks becoming a tokenistic statement.

Goal 6 – Data and Evidence

- This should be your top priority. ESOs often have better data than Defence—a staggering reality given Defence is an \$11.6 billion organisation. Data underpins everything; without a significant investment in evidence-based approaches, other initiatives will lack effectiveness.

Appendix A – Mental Health Reform

- The Defence and Veteran Family Wellbeing Strategy should be explicitly placed within this timeline.

Please let me know if you need anything else from us - we have a deep connection to our community, and so always happy to provide feedback to make these documents the best they can be!

Thanks again,

Legacy Melbourne