

ADF & DVA Exposure Draft Mental Health Strategy – Veterans Reference Group (VRG) Feedback

The Veterans Reference Group (VRG) are veterans who provide advice to the Minister for Veteran Affairs in Tasmania. At the last VRG it was agreed a submission would be made on the Exposure Draft of the Mental Health Strategy.

We want to acknowledge and thank the Commonwealth for the extensive work and consultation undertaken in developing the Mental Health Strategy. The engagement with veterans throughout this process demonstrates a genuine commitment to understanding and addressing the unique challenges faced by those who have served. If implemented thoughtfully and supported by well-structured Action Plans, this strategy has the potential to deliver long-term benefits by improving mental health outcomes, enhancing access to critical services, and fostering a more supportive environment for veterans at every stage of their journey — from service through transition and beyond.

We acknowledge the extensive consultation with veterans that has already been undertaken, and the VRG is aware the feedback on the exposure draft will support the development and release of the Actions Plans for the strategy, potentially addressing some of the concerns we are raising. However, with no release date noted for these, the VRG would appreciate the following concerns being considered.

Some in the VRG have expressed concern that the strategy is too generic, primarily focusing on prevention and not adequately addressing how to manage existing mental health conditions. This is especially troubling in light of the Royal Commission's focus on improving access to mental health services for veterans, both in and out of uniform.

The strategy does not mention the critical transition period for veterans, a key issue raised by the Royal Commission. Concerns were also raised about the strategy overlooking the impacts of military service on mental health, which could disempower those already struggling with mental health conditions.

Below is a summary of our key points, we hope you find our feedback useful. We look forward to seeing the revised strategy and the accompanying Action Plans.

Key Points	Details
Document Structure	Poorly structured and disconnected, lacks clarity, conciseness, and clear deliverables (goals). The document is strategic but lacks an actionable plan for deployment. An additional action plan or example is needed to show how the strategy will benefit Veterans.
Strategic Intent	Lacks a clear strategic intent, vision statement does not explain why reforms are happening or the future direction. It is too long and lacks clarity.
Acknowledgement Statement	The Acknowledgement Statement seems irrelevant and may alienate Veterans. It fails to recognise the contributions of the majority of Veterans.

Key Points	Details
Shared Approach	The shared approach is vague and lacks clear intent. Strategic intent should drive decision-making and measurable outcomes.
Success and Methods	The document lacks detailed information on how the strategy will work, leaving too much undefined and vague. It does not outline what success looks like, methods to achieve success, or key stakeholders involved (Veterans, their families, ESOs, government agencies).
Focus of the Document	The document is inward-looking and does not focus on delivering outcomes to Veterans and their families.
Goal Achievement Details	Lacks details on how goals will be achieved, who is responsible, and how accountability will be ensured.
Link to DVA Wellbeing Model	The DVA wellbeing model is not linked to the goals and pillars in the document, despite being a fundamental element.
Accountability and Measurement	No clear accountability or measurement for how the Strategic Plan will be implemented or its success evaluated.
Wellbeing Factors Integration	The wellbeing factors are not tied into an action plan or future outcomes.
Measurable Outcomes	No KPIs or measurable outcomes for short, medium, and long-term goals.
Follow-Up Plan for Transitioned ADF Personnel	No plan for following up with ADF personnel post-transition or measuring their success/failure in civilian life.
Monitoring and Evaluation	No clear monitoring and evaluation framework; accountability and compliance should be externally monitored (e.g., Defence Ombudsman).
Appendix Relevance	Appendices do not relate to the main document and appear irrelevant, with information seemingly copied from other sources.