

## Mental health boost

By Cpl Corinne Boer

AN \$83m, four-year program to boost the ADF's mental-health care was announced on May 1 in response to a comprehensive review by independent public health specialist Prof David Dunt.

The Review of Mental Health Care in the ADF and Transition through Discharge acknowledged the ADF's mental health commitment but made 52 recommendations for improvement.

Prof Dunt said the ADF's commitment to mental-health strategy compared favourably to military forces in other countries and Australian workplaces.

He said the present situation reflected a lack of funding and resources at the directorate level and regional mental-health teams.

"Its roll-out has been patchy and depended too much on the enthusiasm and commitment of ADF regional mental-health providers,"

Prof Dunt said. CDF ACM Angus Houston has already committed to 49 of the 52 recommendations.

"Since 2002 we've improved the way we care for the people who have mental health problems," ACM Houston said.

"But it is quite clear from Prof Dunt's report that more work needs to be done."

The reform will include:

- providing improved mental health governance and policy;
- an enhanced mental health workforce and improved mental health training support given to ADF personnel and providers;
- enhanced prevention strategies including better research and surveillance;
- enhanced mental health rehabilitation and transition services; and
- greater involvement of families in the mental health of ADF members and better facilities from which mental health services will be delivered.

Prof Dunt said a new model of services would result in better health for members.

"Most importantly, [there] is a need for further development of the mental health workforce," Prof Dunt said.

"There is a need for a significant increase of site psychologists ... as well as more efficient use of these people. [There is a] need for greater involvement of medical officers and doctors in mental health and there should be more training both at initial induction as well as after that."

Defence Science and Personnel Minister Warren Snowdon said implementing the report would ensure easier access to best practice mental health services for ADF members.

"Many of the recommendations can be implemented in the short term while others will take several years to achieve.

This is a significant undertaking and Defence will report regularly to the government about its progress in implementing the recommendations," Mr Snowdon said.

The report is available at [www.defence.gov.au/health/DMH/Review.htm](http://www.defence.gov.au/health/DMH/Review.htm)



Hard facts: CDF ACM Angus Houston, CA Lt-Gen Ken Gillespie and Veterans' Affairs Minister Alan Griffin listen as Prof David Dunt presents the findings of his comprehensive review.  
Photo by Cpl Corinne Boer

## REFORM GOALS

- Increasing oversight of mental health services and the mental health strategy including development of a comprehensive e-health data management record-keeping system.
- Breaking down stigma by demonstrating that Defence's goal is to treat and rehabilitate wherever possible and that discharge on health grounds is the last resort.
- Expanding the Battle Smart (stress management and resilience training) program to improve the psychological resilience of ADF members and their ability to function competently under stress and recover from the impacts of exposure to trauma and adversity.
- Enhancing the ADF Rehabilitation Program through better case management by medical officers and increasing the number of rehabilitation coordinators.
- Ensuring transition service arrangements adequately provide seamless transition from military to civilian life for individuals with mental health issues as well as scoping ways to remain in contact with transitioning members and ensure that all personnel are recognised for their service.
- New and improved facilities for enhanced delivery of mental health services and easier access to care by ADF members and involvement by their families in support programs.
- Augmenting regional mental health teams to provide mental health literacy training to ADF members, engage in preventative work and provide regional outpatient treatment programs.