

Government actions in relation to serving and ex-serving ADF members since the data was collected in 2015

Since the Transition and Wellbeing Research Programme data was collected in 2015, the Government has made significant improvements over consecutive Budgets in health services and support, employment, and transition services for veterans and their families.

- The 2019–20 Budget represents an overall increase of \$300 million in additional funding to veterans and their families compared to 2018–19.
- The funding will help reform the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) processes to ensure veterans and their families receive the services and support they need during transition.
- Included in the new funding is:
 - \$16.2 million in funding to support grants to organisations who support veterans to deliver innovative programs to support veterans to find meaningful employment.
 - \$4.2 million to extend the trial of the Provisional Access to Medical Treatment which will continue to provide veterans with access to treatment for specified conditions before claims are approved, getting veterans treatment faster and preventing the risk of further deterioration of their condition.
 - \$4.0 million to provide training to volunteers who work with veterans enhancing their capability to recognise mental health risks and to provide intervention and support.
 - \$6.2 million to provide family violence victims who are former spouses or de-facto partners of veterans increased support.
- The Government investment of \$30 million to establish six Wellbeing Centres across Australia will facilitate and enable integrated and non-government support for veterans and their families. In addition, the recent Veteran Mental Health and Wellbeing Summit was held to reshape the Veteran Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy and develop a National Action Plan to improve veterans' mental health and wellbeing.
- The Government is currently considering the Productivity Commission report findings which suggest comprehensive solutions to current and emerging issues in the veteran community.
- In 2018–19, the Budget delivered:
 - \$10.8 million for eligible veterans undertaking approved full-time study as part of their rehabilitation plan.
 - \$4.3 million for additional services to help veterans enter the workforce.

- \$4 million for the ongoing implementation of the Prime Minister's Veterans' Employment Program.
- a \$2.2 million expansion of access to mental health treatment for Reservists without the need to link the condition to the person's military service.
- The 2017–18 Budget delivered more than \$58 million in additional mental health support for serving and ex-serving Australian Defence Force (ADF) members and their families, including:
 - expanded access to mental health care for the treatment of any mental health condition, regardless of if it is service-related;
 - an expansion of services to families through Open Arms — Veterans and Families Counselling, and
 - two new suicide prevention initiatives to pilot new approaches to support vulnerable veterans experiencing mental health conditions.
- In October 2017, a \$31 million package of support was announced as part of the Government's response to the Senate Inquiry into Suicide by Veterans and Ex-service Personnel and the Jesse Bird Inquiry, including:
 - \$16.1 million over four years for a new Veteran Payment for financially vulnerable veterans claiming mental health conditions.
 - \$7.1 million over four years to extend support for families of veterans.
 - \$2.1 million over four years for an annual health assessment for ex-serving ADF members for the first five years post-discharge.
 - \$4 million over two years to pilot a case management service for transitioning or recently discharged ADF members.
 - \$1.7 million over two years to undertake a scoping study to professionalise veterans' advocacy.

National Commissioner for Defence and Veteran Suicide Prevention

- On 5 February 2020, the Prime Minister announced a plan to establish a powerful new independent National Commissioner for Defence and Veteran Suicide Prevention to inquire into all suspected veteran and ADF suicides and their causes, including through coronial processes as required, and make recommendations for action.
- The National Commissioner will have relevant powers broadly equivalent to a Royal Commissioner. The National Commissioner will use these powers to ensure they have access to all information needed to inform their inquiries, including information identifying systemic issues, trends and risk factors to inform its reviews or research.

- The Prime Minister has also commissioned an independent inquiry into past veteran and Defence suicides to commence immediately and be overseen by an interim National Commissioner. This will commence with preparatory research and collation of information, prior to the full establishment of the office of the National Commissioner. This preparatory work will include engagement with affected families.
- In addition to the National Commissioner, the Prime Minister also announced the establishment of a statutory Veteran Family Advocate representing the views of veterans and their families to help shape policy and the administration of veteran benefits and support.

Transition from the ADF

- Approximately 5,500-6,500 members leave the military each year, with approximately 19 per cent transitioning for medical reasons.
- The Government provides comprehensive transition support service for all members completing a period of full-time service.
- DVA is aware of, and able to reach out to, every person who joined the ADF since 1 January 2016; and those who left the ADF after 27 July 2016. To date, more than 19,000 current and former ADF members who have not made a claim or otherwise approached DVA have been registered with the department.
- DVA acknowledges that some veterans have had a difficult experience dealing with the department and is committed to putting veterans and their families first. To that end, DVA is progressing its own transformation to meet the current and future needs of all veterans and their families.

Access to Defence health care for serving ADF members

- Since the data were collected in 2015, government agencies including Defence and DVA have invested in a range of programs targeting transition, suicide prevention and support for families.
- Defence is strengthening its approach to family-sensitive practice across all its health centres to support better engagement with families.
- Through the Defence Health Care System ADF Members undertake periodic and opportunistic assessment of risk factors for mental and physical health conditions to facilitate early intervention.
- ADF members, their families and the community can be confident in the system that supports the health and wellbeing of serving members.

- Defence takes a whole-of-organisation approach to health support, mental health and wellbeing, from time of recruitment, through military and public service careers, to transition and life beyond Defence.
- Equity with Medicare is what underpins Defence health policy, which is designed to ensure the range of subsidised health services that are available to the general community, are also available to all ADF members.
- Defence aims to always provide and support access to member centred, command responsive and recovery-focussed health care with the goal of enabling our people to return to duty, or return to work. Where this is not possible we endeavour to find them a more suitable role or to provide assistance for their transition into civilian life.
- Defence acknowledges the contribution that people leaving the ADF have made during their time in service, and works closely with DVA to improve coordination and support arrangements to assist ADF members as they transition to civilian life.
- Defence regularly reviews and evaluates its policies and programs to ensure it continues to deliver best practice health care.
- Defence actively seeks feedback from ADF members to ensure treatments and recovery programs best meet the needs of our people.
- Defence is better prepared than after previous wars and conflicts to recognise mental health problems, intervene early, provide effective treatments and enable defence members to return to work as soon as possible either within or outside of the ADF.

Improving Veteran experience

- The Government is committed to improving transition outcomes for current and former serving ADF members and their families.
- Many ADF members and their families manage transition from the military to civilian life well. The Government recognises that for some people transition is a period of significant change which can result in increased vulnerability to physical and mental health stresses.
- The Government is focused on improving the way veterans and their families' transition from the Defence environment, and acknowledges the work of the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade and the Productivity Commission in their examination of transition from the ADF.

- The Government is currently considering the recommendations of the Productivity Commission's report in alignment with its response to both the JSCFADT Inquiry report recommendations, and the Veterans Advocacy and Support Services Scoping Study to further inform the way it supports ADF members and their families through transition into civilian life.
- A significant amount of work is already underway to improve the transition experience for ADF members and their families, including:
 - implementing a better transition process, reviewing and improving support for families, including enhancements to the Partner Employment Assistance Program;
 - providing access to enhanced employment support for early leavers and medically transitioning members with complex circumstances as part of the transition process;
 - automatically issuing transitioning members with a White Card which entitles them to free mental health treatment for any condition, without the need to prove it is related to their service;
 - introducing the Veteran Payment to provide interim financial support for eligible veterans while a claim for a mental health condition is being determined;
 - from 1 July 2019, transitioning members are able to access an annual comprehensive mental and physical health assessment from their GP for the first five years post-separation;
 - introducing the Wellbeing and Support Program, which provides an intensive and supportive case management service for those transitioning who require additional support;
 - increased information sharing allowing for earlier engagement with transitioning members to proactively offer support;
 - establishing processes to deliver continuity of care for medically transitioning members;
 - improving mental health and wellbeing support provided to members and their families during and after military service; and
 - conducting joint research to develop our understanding of veterans' needs.

Veteran employment

- We know the best type of support for our ex-service men and women is the economic independence that comes with a job.
- The Government encourages Australian industry to recognise that employing veterans is a smart business decision. Former ADF members have an extensive range of skills, abilities, training and attributes that make them valuable employees in the civilian workforce.

- In November 2016, the Prime Minister launched the Veterans' Employment Program, which aims to encourage industry to recognise and appreciate the unique skills and valuable experience that members of the ADF can bring to the workplace. Importantly, an additional \$16.2 million in funding to support grants has been provided to organisations who support veterans to deliver innovative programs to support veterans to find meaningful employment.
- In July 2017 Defence introduced a post transition follow-up call, which occurs approximately four weeks after the member has transitioned, and an electronic survey to stay connected with former members.
- Data from the Defence's Post Transition Survey (as at 31 August 2019) shows that three months after transition from the ADF, 42 per cent of transitioned members are working full-time, 11 per cent are working part-time and 12 per cent are looking for work. The balance of transitioned members surveyed are either studying, working and studying, retired or not looking for work.
- The proportion of former ADF members looking for work trends down to 8 per cent at 12 months after leaving.