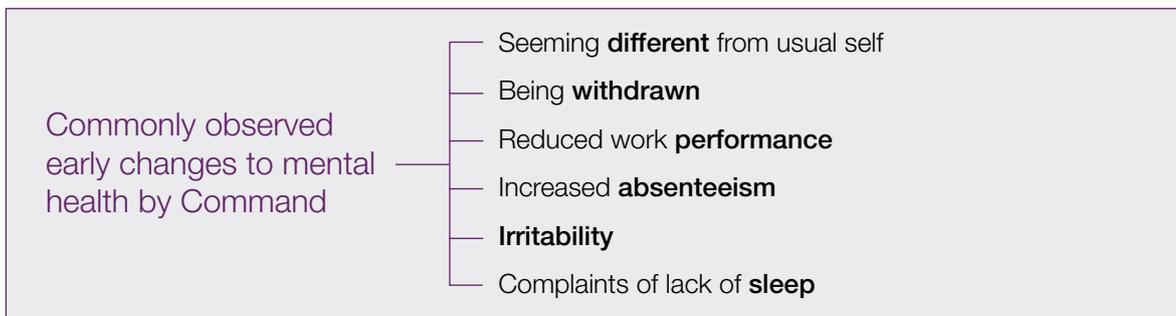


Wellness Action Through Checking Health (WATCH)

Command

Changes in the mental health and wellbeing of ADF members can appear at any time throughout their career and might look different for each person. Early identification and intervention leads to better mental health and improved capability and functioning of the workforce. The Wellness Action Through Checking Health (WATCH) research project asked Command personnel about early changes to ADF members' mental health.

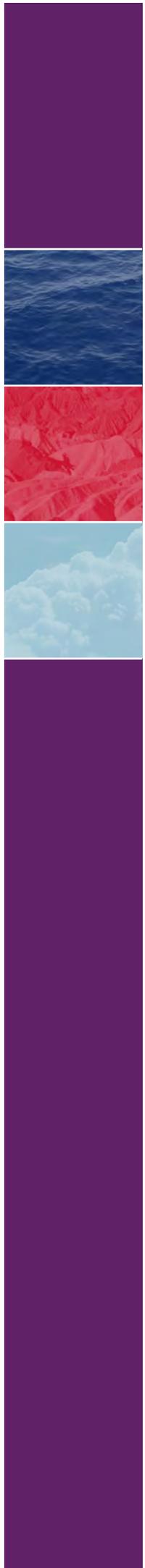


What helps or hinders Command offering support to ADF members once changes in mental health were observed?

Helps	Hinders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having a good rapport with ADF members • Knowing the individual ADF member's baseline of wellbeing • Having strong and effective leadership skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ADF members feeling a stigma around seeking help for mental health problems • Having limited resources (e.g. understaffing) • ADF member's fears around career impact • Lack of self-awareness in members

What supports did Command offer to ADF members when they observed changes in their mental health?

- Command personnel reflected on their own training and education for conversations about changes in mental health with ADF members.
- Most commonly, Command referred to completing skill-building training (such as BattleSMART, Mental Health First Aid, Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training, etc).
- Command also referred to their own experiences when offering support.



How can commanders support early identification?

Know your people

- The biggest indicator of early mental health challenges is when ADF members seem different from their usual selves. This could be in relation to their mood or behaviour, relationships, interactions with others, absence or presence, or their physical appearance.
- Get to know ADF members under your command: develop rapport, and understand their baseline (usual) demeanour and wellbeing.

Start a conversation

- Reach out to ADF members who seem different from their usual selves.
- Have a conversation with ADF members in a private space where they feel safe.
- Early mental health changes can worsen if ignored. Reaching out early can result in better outcomes for ADF members.

Encourage ADF members to reach out for support

- Offer tips around how to self-manage common early changes in mental health. These may include increasing physical activity and boosting social engagement.
- Encourage reaching out to family and friends. Good support networks are very beneficial for ADF members.

Show empathy and understanding

- Draw on your own or others' experiences when talking with members under your command. This might include personal experience with mental health challenges or examples of colleagues or family.
- Through sharing stories of experience, reduce the perceived barrier of stigma around help-seeking.

Resources



Defence
Leaders Toolkit
(requires DPN
access)



Defence Health and
wellbeing fact sheets



Headstrength



NewAccess

Key take-aways

- **Getting to know members on a personal level** will help identify when they might be struggling.
- **It is important to reach out to members who you suspect might be struggling** as symptoms can get worse if they are ignored.
- **Talk about your own or others' experiences with mental health challenges** and encourage members to reach out to supports. This can help members who are struggling to feel less alone.



To read the full WATCH Project Report [click here](#) or scan the QR code. Contact the research team for more information at health.research@defence.gov.au.