



Australian Government

Department of Defence

Department of Veterans' Affairs

# DEFENCE AND VETERAN MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING STRATEGY 2025 – 2030



The Department of Defence and the Department of Veterans' Affairs acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia. We recognise their continuing connection to traditional lands and waters and would like to pay respect to their Elders both past and present.

We would also like to pay respect to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have contributed to the defence of Australia in times of peace and war.

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This document includes information about mental health, bereavement and suicide that readers may find distressing. If you need to talk to someone, the following organisations can help:

### Open Arms


Open Arms is the leading provider of free mental health assessment and counselling for Defence members, veterans and families. They offer both individual and relationship counselling to help build strong and healthy relationships at all stages of family life.


 1800 011 046

 [openarms.gov.au](http://openarms.gov.au)

### Defence Member and Family Helpline


The Helpline is available 24/7 to assist Defence members and families. The Helpline provides assessment, advice, assistance or referral depending on the needs of the Defence member and their family.


 1800 624 608

 [defence.gov.au/adf-members-families/crisis-support/helplines/defence-member-family-helpline](http://defence.gov.au/adf-members-families/crisis-support/helplines/defence-member-family-helpline)

### ADF Chaplains


Chaplains provide pastoral, spiritual, religious and welfare support.


 1300 333 362

 [defence.gov.au/adf-members-families/crisis-support/helplines/chaplaincy-services](http://defence.gov.au/adf-members-families/crisis-support/helplines/chaplaincy-services)

### ADF Mental Health All Hours Support Line


Mental health and wellbeing advice for Defence members and families.


 1800 628 036

 [defence.gov.au/adf-members-families/crisis-support/helplines/all-hours-support-line](http://defence.gov.au/adf-members-families/crisis-support/helplines/all-hours-support-line)

### 13 YARN

13YARN is the national crisis support line for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are feeling overwhelmed or having difficulty coping.


 13 92 76

 [13yarn.org.au](http://13yarn.org.au)

### 1800 IMSICK


1800 IMSICK is a national 24/7 nurse triage and health support line for Defence members if they become ill or injured after hours or are not near a Defence health facility.

 1800 467 425

 [defence.gov.au/adf-members-families/health-well-being/services-support-fighting-fit/1800-imsick](http://defence.gov.au/adf-members-families/health-well-being/services-support-fighting-fit/1800-imsick)

### 1800 VETERAN


1800 VETERAN is Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA's) general phone number. It is available between 8am to 5pm, Monday to Friday. It's a way of finding out about the wealth of support offered by DVA.

 1800 838 372

 [dva.gov.au](http://dva.gov.au)

### 1800 RESPECT


1800 RESPECT is the national Sexual Assault, Domestic and Family Violence Counselling Service for anyone living in Australia. The service provides telephone and online crisis and trauma counselling.


 1800 737 732

 [1800respect.org.au](http://1800respect.org.au)

### Kids Helpline

Kids Helpline is a free, and anonymous 24/7 telephone and online counselling service specifically for young people 5–25 years old.

 1800 551 800

 [kidshelpline.com.au](http://kidshelpline.com.au)

### Lifeline


Lifeline is a national 24-hour support line, which provides crisis support and mental health services.


 131 114

 [lifeline.org.au](http://lifeline.org.au)

### Mensline Australia


Mensline Australia is a national 24/7 service for men, providing support, information, or referral by telephone or online.


 1300 789 978

 [mensline.org.au](http://mensline.org.au)

### Relationships Australia

Relationships Australia offers counselling, family dispute resolution, mediation, and a range of family and community support and education programs.


 1300 364 277

 [relationships.org.au](http://relationships.org.au)

### Suicide Call Back Service


Suicide Call Back Service offers free professional 24/7 telephone counselling support to people at risk of suicide, concerned about someone at risk, bereaved by suicide and people experiencing emotional or mental health issues.

 1300 659 467

 [suicidecallbackservice.org.au](http://suicidecallbackservice.org.au)

### The Family Relationship Advice Line

The Family Relationship Advice Line helps families affected by relationship or separation issues, including information on parenting arrangements after separation. It can also refer callers to local services that provide assistance.

 1800 050 321

 [familyrelationships.gov.au/talk-someone/advice-line](http://familyrelationships.gov.au/talk-someone/advice-line)







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# Foreword

People are the most important Australian Defence capability. The resilience, dedication and professionalism of the Defence and veteran community underpin our national security.

We want Australians to be attracted to serving our nation in our Australian Defence Force, and confident that they and their families will be respected and well supported by their leaders, their mates and the broader Defence organisation. In addition, they should be safe in the knowledge that whatever may befall them during their service, they will be properly looked after, and their service acknowledged, respected and commemorated by a grateful nation.

As such, it is our nation's duty to empower and support their mental health and wellbeing.

This means providing for our people and their families to serve well, live well and age well, no matter where they are on their Defence and veteran journey. This strategy adopts a preventive and holistic approach. In addition to early intervention and comprehensive care, it prioritises wellbeing from the day they sign up, until well after they've hung up their uniform for the last time. By embracing a life course approach, we honour the service and acknowledge the sacrifices made by the Defence and veteran community

This strategy unites the Department of Defence and the Department of Veterans' Affairs in their resolve to foster a culture of proactive wellbeing and mental health care. It leverages combined expertise and resources to ensure our Defence and veteran community receive the support they need during and after service. This strategy is complemented by action plans that describe the initiatives, programs and services that will achieve our goals and outcomes.

This strategy will fortify Australia's Defence capability by building a positive culture, with leadership that empowers self-agency and supports the wellbeing of Defence's integrated workforce. Our approach will help Defence achieve the outcomes of the *National Defence Strategy 2024* while improving recruitment and retention of personnel in the Australian Defence Force.

We acknowledge the work of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide. The insights and reports of the Royal Commission, as well as other reports including the Productivity Commission's: *A Better Way to Support Veterans* inform our wellbeing and suicide prevention initiatives, programs and services. This includes the co-design of a new agency focused on veteran wellbeing.

I am proud to share with you the first joint Defence and Veteran Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy. It provides a shared vision, goals and outcomes for meaningful change to empower every member of our Defence and veteran community to lead healthy and fulfilling lives.

The journey ahead requires concentrated effort and unwavering dedication in order to build a more resilient and healthier Defence and veteran community.

I sincerely thank all those who have provided input. You have helped shape the vision, goals, outcomes and priorities in this strategy in an effort to improve the mental health and wellbeing outcomes for those in the Defence and veteran community.

If this document raises any mental health or wellbeing concerns for you, please see the supports that are listed at on [page i](#) of this strategy.



*Matt Keogh*

**The Honourable Matt Keogh MP**  
Minister for Veterans' Affairs  
Minister for Defence Personnel

# Vision

The Department of Defence and the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) are committed to working together to improve the mental health and wellbeing of the Defence and veteran community. Setting conditions that empower and support mental health and wellbeing during recruitment, service, employment, deployment, transition and post-Defence life are of utmost importance to the Australian Government. Defence's ability to attract, retain and care about people is fundamental to Defence capability and workforce sustainment.

## Our shared vision is:

Members of the Defence and veteran community are empowered and supported for optimal mental health and wellbeing during service or employment, during transition to civilian life and beyond.

## Reforming our approach

We have made significant investments in mental health and wellbeing over the decades because people are the foundation of Defence capability.

Past Defence and DVA strategies have applied a social and individual health-based approach. This joint strategy extends the approach. In addition to providing mental health and wellbeing supports and services, we aim to embed mental health and wellbeing considerations into broader decision-making, policy, process and education. This will keep

healthy people healthy and improve the pathways to optimal health during and after illness or injury. This strategy will empower and support the Defence and veteran community to live healthier and more productive lives, with access to the services they need when and where needed.

**Appendix A** provides an overview of past mental health reform.

We acknowledge the work of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide. Insights from their report informs the strategy's actions and implementation for our suicide prevention initiatives, programs and services. This Strategy complements the activities in the Australian Government response to the Royal Commission Final Report including the commitment to transition and wellbeing supports, and the co-design of a new agency focused on wellbeing.





# The Defence and veteran community

This strategy is written for the Defence and veteran community. From a mental health and wellbeing perspective, this community includes:

- » serving Defence members and their families
- » veterans and their families
- » Australian Public Service (APS) employees
- » Defence contractors
- » Australian Defence Force (ADF) cadets and cadet volunteers.

While mental health and wellbeing should be considered throughout the Defence and veteran journey, Defence and DVA policies describe the entitlements to Defence and DVA initiatives, programs and services.

Military service is different from civilian employment. It provides opportunities for meaningful work, security and connection. It also places unique demands on and requires sacrifices from Defence members, veterans and their families.

Defence members actively protect Australia's national interests and train to achieve mastery in their professions. Their roles can be dangerous and demanding. They often deploy at short notice for unknown lengths of time with limited resources in hostile conditions. Teams have strong bonds, with a shared reliance, trust and confidence. Defence APS employees and contractors work alongside their military counterparts and are integral to success.

Defence offers challenging and rewarding work that inspires individuals and teams to perform at their best. Our personnel forgo some of the privileges and freedoms the Australian public take for granted. We acknowledge the impact of this on our people, our veterans and their families. We recognise the importance of family and community support to individual and collective wellbeing.

The positive qualities developed through Defence service – discipline, teamwork, leadership, adaptability and a strong sense of purpose – support veterans in civilian life. These qualities help veterans navigate new environments with confidence, and help them to continue to contribute meaningfully to their community. By recognising and building upon these qualities, we can better support veterans to thrive beyond military service.



Mental health and wellbeing has a complementary relationship with organisational culture and work health and safety both within Defence and across the broader Australian community. We are investing in wellbeing, culture, health and safety to foster an environment that empowers and supports the mental health and wellbeing of the Defence and veteran community.

*The Defence Culture Strategy: Defence Culture Blueprint Program 2023* sets our culture vision and culture objectives. *The Defence Work Health and Safety Strategy 2023–2028* provides the framework for enabling a capable, resilient and sustainable workforce that can adapt to complex and uncertain environments.

Our vision and goals for mental health and wellbeing frame the priorities in the *Veteran Transition Strategy* and the *Defence and Veteran Family Wellbeing Strategy 2025–2030*.

Our departmental action plans describe how we will empower and support the Defence and veteran community. They will describe how we will improve existing and new initiatives, programs and services. They will also describe the application of wellbeing factors across the Defence and DVA enterprises.

# A shared approach

This strategy supports the mental health and wellbeing of the Defence and veteran community in times of peace and in times of conflict.

Fostering a culture that empowers and supports mental health and wellbeing is a shared responsibility. Government, leaders, commanders, managers, supervisors, teams, healthcare providers, claims staff, frontline service providers, individuals and families in the Defence and veteran community all have a role to play.

A shared approach to mental health and wellbeing will:

- » embed wellbeing factors into individual, team and departmental decision-making
- » support efforts to grow a resilient Defence workforce, grow community and connection, and strengthen Defence capability
- » guide improvements to mental health and wellbeing initiatives, programs and services
- » improve the connection of veterans with the broader Australian community
- » strengthen interdepartmental partnerships between Defence and DVA
- » strengthen partnerships with other Australian Government departments, state and territory governments, ex-service organisations and community organisations.

Our leaders and managers are key to embedding mental health, wellbeing and effectiveness in our work environments. They will continue to support those with mental health and wellbeing concerns to work and remain connected where possible. They will reduce stigma and increase trust related to mental health and wellbeing concerns. Connections to work, colleagues, friends and community are critical for maintaining and recapturing mental health and wellbeing.

Our shared approach will drive clear and meaningful actions, creating measurable outcomes for the strategy and action plans.





**Table 1:** Expected outcomes of the strategy

Time frame	Outcomes
<b>Short term</b> At 1 year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Defence and DVA initiatives enhance mental health and wellbeing capability</li> <li>» Increased reach of preventive mental health and wellbeing initiatives</li> <li>» Increased provision and quality of mental health and wellbeing care and support</li> <li>» Improved promotion of mental health and wellbeing initiatives</li> <li>» Defence and DVA promote community connections</li> <li>» Improved Defence and DVA collaboration to support mental health and wellbeing</li> <li>» Increased investment in and prioritisation of research and evaluation</li> <li>» Increased knowledge and understanding of risk and protective factors for suicide and suicidality</li> </ul>
<b>Medium term</b> At 3 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Increased culture of wellbeing (organisational commitment from Defence and DVA for mental health and wellbeing)</li> <li>» Improved mental health and wellbeing capability</li> <li>» Increased engagement in preventive mental health and wellbeing initiatives</li> <li>» Increased engagement in timely, safe and quality mental health and wellbeing initiatives</li> <li>» Increased social connectedness among the Defence and veteran community</li> <li>» Improved knowledge translation</li> <li>» Increased protective factors for suicide</li> <li>» Decreased risk factors for suicide</li> </ul>
<b>Long term</b> At 5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Improved Defence culture (workplace climate, retention and employee satisfaction)</li> <li>» Reduced mental health stigma</li> <li>» Mental health and wellbeing are embedded in Defence and DVA</li> <li>» Joint evidence base of what works for optimal mental health and wellbeing</li> <li>» Reduced systemic barriers to accessing care</li> <li>» Reduced suicidal ideation, behaviour, distress and long-term incidence of suicide</li> <li>» Improved mental health and wellbeing among the Defence and veteran community</li> </ul>

# Wellbeing and the Defence and veteran journey

Together, we will empower and support the Defence and veteran community to serve well, live well and age well across the wellbeing factors and through their Defence and veteran journey.

## Wellbeing factors

Wellbeing is complex and unique to each individual. It is about the person, their family and their community. It evolves over a lifetime and affects a person's quality of life. Some aspects of wellbeing are universal. Examples are health and mental health, recognition and respect, income and finance, and meaning and spirituality. But wellbeing varies according to personal attitudes, experiences, life events, and the availability of resources and support.

We recognise that biological, psychological, social and spiritual factors affect mental health and wellbeing. Nine wellbeing factors (see Figure 1) will provide the foundation for our work in expanding mental health and wellbeing beyond access to mental healthcare services and support. These wellbeing factors represent life aspects that are crucial to wellbeing.



Figure 1: Wellbeing Factors



## The Defence and veteran journey

Although each person's journey through life is unique, there are standard stages in the Defence and veteran journey. Families are there for every stage of the journey. The main stages are:

- » recruitment and onboarding
- » service, employment, engagement and deployment in Defence
- » transfer, separation or leaving Defence
- » post-Defence life, which has many different stages.

Our life course approach considers how different life stages and experiences affect our health and wellbeing. It recognises that all stages of a person's life are intricately intertwined with each other, with the lives of others born in the same period, and with the lives of past and future generations. A life course approach involves taking action early in a person's life and during their life stages.

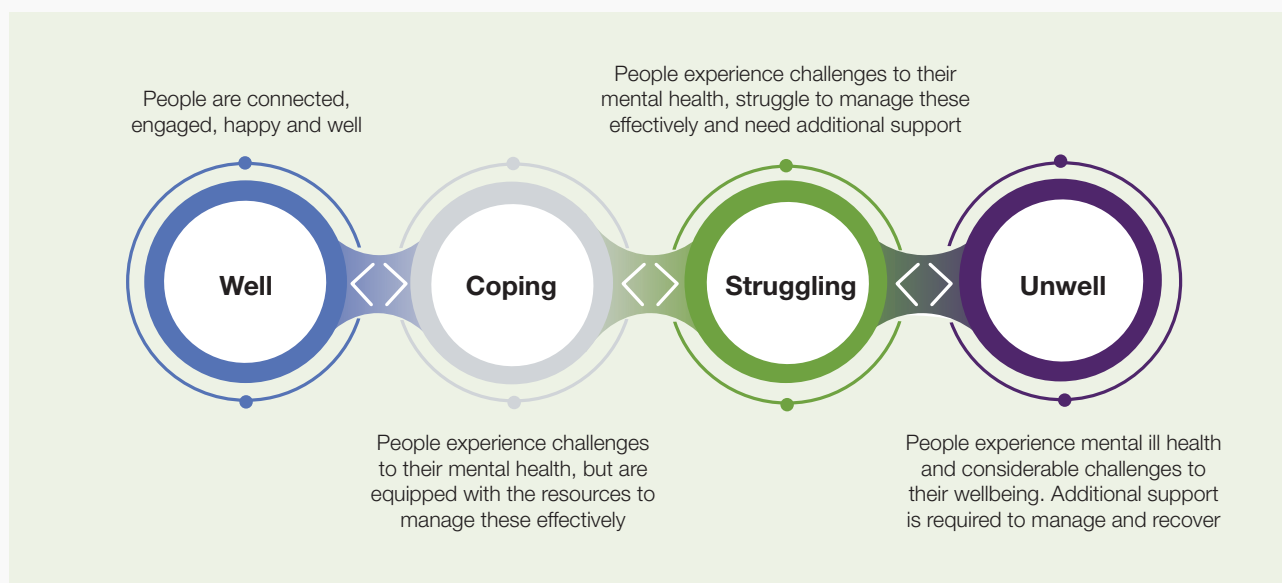
**Appendix B** describes each stage of the Defence and veteran journey for Defence members, APS employees and contractors. Regardless of service or employment type, enhancing the wellbeing factors at every stage contributes to overall health and wellbeing. For example:

- » **Recruitment.** Joining Defence as a Defence member, APS employee, ADF cadet or contractor can be a significant adjustment. Adopting the wellbeing factors will help Defence to empower and support mental health and wellbeing during recruitment and onboarding. This will set people up for optimal outcomes going forward.
- » **Service or employment.** Working in Defence can present different opportunities and unique challenges. Defence members actively protect Australia's national interests and train to achieve mastery in their professions. Their roles can be dangerous and demanding. We are committed to fostering a positive culture that enables Defence capability by empowering and supporting mental health and wellbeing during employment and deployment.
- » **Separation and transition.** Separation and transition are significant times in the Defence and veteran journey. The *Veteran Transition Strategy* describes the preparation and supports that help individuals and their families to transition well and go on to live fulfilling lives.

- » **Post-service civilian life.** Post-service civilian life is varied. It could involve retirement, travel, study, self-care or caring for others, re-engagement with Defence, other employment opportunities, family or a combination of these experiences. People need meaningful connections and purpose following separation and transition from Defence. DVA is committed to ensuring the service and sacrifice of Australians in war, conflicts and peace operations are respected and recognised.
- » **Ageing.** Mental health and wellbeing are important as we age. These can be affected by changing living arrangements, more frequent grief and loss, and reduced social connections. Age-related conditions and disabilities can cause pain, limit mobility and require medication. An age-appropriate approach to empowering and supporting our people will be essential for mental health and wellbeing.
- » **Beyond.** Bereavement support across the Defence and veteran community is important when someone dies. We will empower and support our people in their efforts to show respect, celebrate achievements, maintain connections, and cope with grief and the intergenerational aspects of service.



# The mental health and wellbeing continuum



**Figure 2:** Mental health and wellbeing continuum

A person's mental health and wellbeing is dynamic. It can deteriorate or improve over time. We will focus on positive wellbeing, prevention and self-agency, working to ensure a trauma-informed approach to service delivery. We will help the Defence and veteran community to remain in or move towards the well end of the mental health and wellbeing continuum (see *Figure 2*).

This strategy will use the continuum at the individual, organisational and structural levels for a mutually reinforcing approach to mental health and wellbeing. We will:

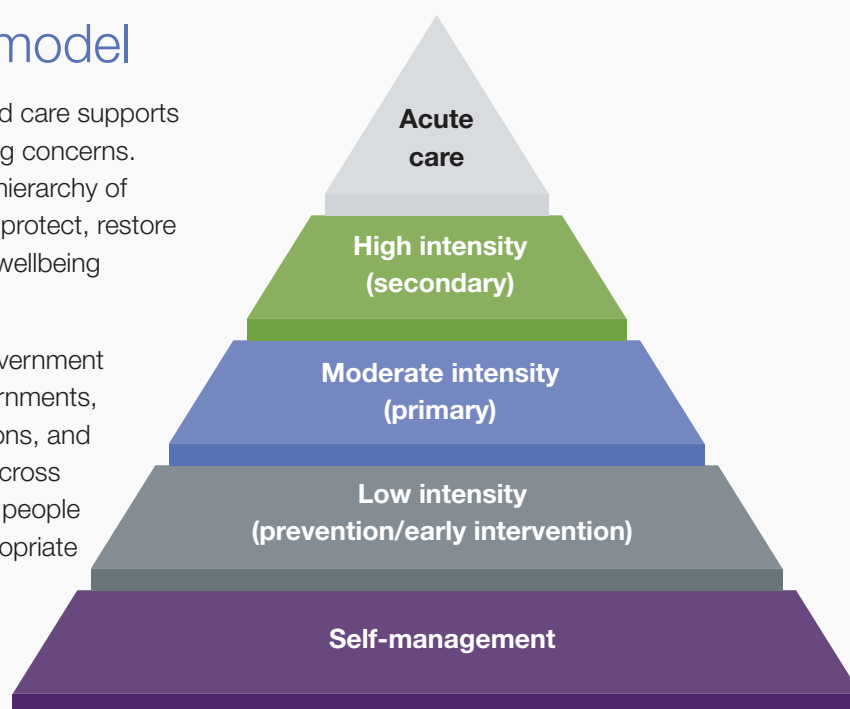
- » work to embed wellbeing factors into decision-making and to find outcomes that work for the individual, team and organisation
- » consult people with lived experience to gather diverse perspectives and experiences when designing or improving initiatives, programs and services
- » co-design a new agency focused on veteran wellbeing which will:
  - support veterans, current serving members, and families with system navigation and connection
  - improve referral pathways and service integration
  - co-design prevention and early intervention wellbeing support and services
  - support transition of personnel from service life to civilian life.
- » provide education and training programs for the Defence and veteran community so individuals can build resilience and self-agency in the wellbeing factors, and so they are able to access the appropriate initiatives, programs and services as needed
- » help people who are struggling, to prevent them from becoming unwell
- » deliver the right care at the right time to promote recovery should a person have mental health or wellbeing concerns
- » support the provision and accessibility of mental health treatment in rural and remote areas.



## The stepped care model

Our evidence-based model of stepped care supports those with mental health and wellbeing concerns. The model (see **Figure 3**) provides a hierarchy of support. It helps our people improve, protect, restore and maintain their mental health and wellbeing across the continuum.

We will work with other Australian Government departments, state and territory governments, ex-service and community organisations, and the private sector to deliver support across the wellbeing factors. This will ensure people have access to coordinated and appropriate support at the right time and place.



**Figure 3:** Stepped care model

## Quality of life and life expectancy

The National Suicide Prevention Office has recommended a broad and proactive focus across personal life experiences and social health determinants to improve quality of life, life expectancy, mental health and wellbeing. The wellbeing factors in this strategy represent an increased focus for wellbeing, including both individual wellbeing offerings and the structural enablers for wellbeing.

Although there are links between poor mental health and suicidality, most individuals with mental health concerns do not have suicidal thoughts and not everyone who has suicidal thoughts or behaviours will have a mental health issue.

The Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide analysed risk factors relevant to Defence and veteran death by suicide. It recommended a contemporary assessment of hazards related to the health and wellbeing of Defence personnel to inform the delivery of this strategy. Our action plans are informed by the *Australian Government Response to the Final Report of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide*.

We will continue our work with experts on emerging trends to inform our approach to suicide prevention.

# Goals

This strategy has six goals. These are the focus for our actions for the duration of the strategy. Action plans detail our planned activities to deliver each goal. The action plans are dynamic documents that will evolve over the lifetime of this strategy. Collaborative implementation of joint actions within and across the departments is key to the strategy's success.

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## Goal 1: Promote and assist wellbeing

Promoting and assisting wellbeing are important because work, community and environment can positively influence the physical, mental, social and spiritual factors that underpin mental health and wellbeing.

Research highlights the impact of a shared approach to mental health and wellbeing. Leaders and managers can have a positive influence on people, beyond just managing work health and safety risks.

We will work with other Australian Government departments, the state and territory governments, ex-service organisations and community organisations to provide structural enablers and individual supports for those who are navigating wellbeing challenges.

We will empower and support the Defence and veteran community to obtain, maintain and improve their self-agency in physical, mental, social and spiritual wellbeing. We will do this by:

- » fostering individual and collective wellbeing through a positive culture and the aligned wellbeing factors
- » providing a preventive and holistic approach to mental health and wellbeing
- » providing initiatives, programs and services that build physical, social, emotional and spiritual skills and connections.

## Goal 2: Improve mental health and wellbeing through prevention and early intervention

Prevention benefits every person, no matter how well or unwell they are. Empowering and supporting a person's wellbeing will help them to build resilience, have self-agency and manage their mental health.

Early identification of the signs and symptoms of struggling or being unwell enables timely help. This can prevent a person's condition from becoming worse and harder to treat. Early intervention with proper care and treatment makes it possible for individuals to recover from mental health challenges.

We will deliver prevention and early intervention programs and services to support the wellbeing of the Defence and veteran community and to keep them mentally healthy. We will do this by:

- » building the ability of individuals to identify when they or others are struggling with their mental health and to access the support that is available
- » working with individuals and teams to support people to the well end of the mental health and wellbeing continuum
- » building a culture through education and change that supports people to feel comfortable in asking for help and accessing the support they need.



## Goal 3: Facilitate timely access to quality care and support

The Defence and veteran community has stressed the importance of timely access to treatment and support where they are needed. Identifying and overcoming the systemic barriers that can impact access to mental health services and support is critical to improving the timely access to care. Research also shows that timely access to care prevents the deterioration of mental health issues. The *Australian Government Response to the Final Report of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide* included recommendations relevant to and considered within this goal.

We will design initiatives, programs and services that consider the different needs of each group in the delivery of safe and quality care. We will do this by:

- » enhancing continuity of care through a coordinated approach across the Defence and veteran journey

- » strengthening our systems to ensure initiatives, programs and services are appropriate, delivered at the right time and right place, and informed by best practice
- » improving the education and capability of commanders and managers to support mental health and wellbeing
- » empowering self-agency in navigating the care and support pathways
- » considering the family when developing and managing care and support pathways
- » supporting rehabilitation after injury and illness so personnel can continue to work in Defence, or where this is not possible, can transition to post-service civilian life.



## Goal 4: Grow a positive and connected Defence and veteran community

Meaningful connections are vital for wellbeing. Growing community connections within Defence and with civilian communities will help the Defence and veteran community. It will also help civilian communities to understand the work we do and the needs of our people.

Connections can protect individuals and teams. They contribute to maintaining purpose and belonging along the Defence and veteran journey. It is particularly important during periods of deployment and transition.

DVA has a proud history of delivering commemorative activities with and across the community to preserve awareness about the service and sacrifice of Defence personnel who have served Australia. Recognition and respect are central to the commemorative program. They are also fundamental aspects of positive wellbeing. DVA's commemorative program supports social interaction and connection to community, which can lead to feelings of belonging and inclusion.

During consultation for this strategy, the Defence and veteran community emphasised the importance of informal support from family, friends and the community. They reflected on the importance of maintaining connections within and outside of Defence.

Community connections enhance resilience when our people are well and coping. They also enhance the effectiveness of care and support when our people are struggling or unwell. Veterans and their families provide significant ongoing contributions to the Australian community during and after transition from military service.

We will work to build positive relationships and healthy communities by improving how we:

- » promote the value of military service (past, present and future) across the Australian population
- » promote the positive aspects of service and domain-specific cultures
- » manage positive connections through respect, reward and recognition
- » assist serving members, veterans and families to maintain connections with the civilian community
- » strengthen connection among Defence, DVA, other government departments, ex-service organisations and community organisations to improve wellbeing outcomes
- » assist veterans and families to build and maintain connection with each other post service.





## Goal 5: Prioritise suicide prevention initiatives

**The following section includes content on suicide prevention. If this raises any concerns for you, please refer to *page i* of this strategy for the supports available to you.**

Wellbeing promotion, prevention and early intervention can enhance quality of life and life expectancy. We will continue to expand our education for the Defence and veteran community so they can identify and address signs of distress in themselves and others, and can access initiatives, programs and services.

Our action plans help us to strengthen and coordinate our approach to suicide prevention and postvention. They will address the unique needs and drivers of distress within the Defence and veteran community. They will align with the whole-of-government approach, which is led by the National Suicide Prevention Office. They will enhance wellbeing through practical initiatives, programs and services across the wellbeing factors. This aims to reduce suicidal distress, provide appropriate support to those who need it and, in the longer term, reduce the suicide rate.

We will deliver suicide prevention initiatives to empower and support quality of life and life expectancy in the Defence and veteran community. We will do this by:

- » promoting protective factors to strengthen baseline wellbeing and help our people to obtain, maintain and improve their mental health and wellbeing
- » building a culture that de-stigmatises suicidal distress, thoughts and/or behaviour
- » building organisational, individual and community understanding to enable the early identification and response to suicidal distress, thoughts and/or behaviour
- » helping leaders and managers to identify groups disproportionately impacted by suicide, intervene early and reduce risk factors to prevent suicide and/or suicidal behaviours
- » empowering access to appropriate care and support, crisis response when needed, bereavement and postvention services
- » ensure continuity of care and support through a coordinated approach with the health, social and suicide prevention sectors
- » delivering effective and safe initiatives, programs and services with a clear evidence base and informed by lived experience.

## Goal 6: Use evidence and data to drive positive outcomes

The Productivity Commission's Inquiry Report: *A Better Way to Support Veterans* recommended measuring, evaluating and continuously improving Defence and DVA initiatives, programs and services to improve mental health and wellbeing. A 2023 ministerial roundtable on Defence and veteran mental health and wellbeing highlighted the need for evidence-based tools and programs, data-driven care and capitalising on data collected across an individual's lifespan.

The University of Canberra's work on evaluating Defence's *Continuous Improvement Framework* and the *Defence Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2018–2023* found that we need appropriate data and evaluation capabilities to continuously improve mental health and wellbeing programs and services.

Improving our use of evidence and data will have benefits for Defence and DVA, consistent with the Royal Commission recommendations regarding research, knowledge transfer, data and insights. It will help with the optimisation of human performance, enable informed decision-making, and support the design of mental health and wellbeing initiatives, programs and services.

We are committed to improving both the quality and application of evidence and data. We will do this by:

- » investing in and expanding our research and evaluation to maintain high standards and best practice
- » ensuring current programs and services are meeting the needs of individuals and communities through engagement, high-quality data and evaluation alongside the Australian Centre for Evaluation
- » using engagement, high-quality data and evaluation so programs and services contribute to positive outcomes for the Defence and veteran community.





# Monitoring and evaluation

The monitoring and evaluation framework for this strategy is guided by the *Commonwealth Evaluation Policy* and supporting Toolkit.

Our monitoring and evaluation framework provides the program logic (see **Appendix C**), outcome descriptions and data matrix for this strategy and its action plans:

- » The program logic will illustrate how inputs will enable the goals of the strategy. It shows how we expect our actions to achieve the short-term (at 1 year), medium-term (at 3 years) and long-term (at 5 years) outcomes that are in **Table 1**.
- » The program logic is supported by outcome descriptions. These describe what is meant by each outcome in more detail and provide an overview of how progress towards these outcomes will be measured.
- » The data matrix is a list of the specific indicators that we will measure in our monitoring. It will help us to track our progress and report against the strategy's outcomes. The data matrix is an internal document.

Monitoring and evaluation frameworks will be developed for new initiatives that will contribute to the strategy's goals. This will help to ensure these initiatives are outcomes-focused. These frameworks will also align with the strategy's monitoring and evaluation framework. This means that initiatives will have their own program logics and data matrixes nested under the strategy.

We will use formal evaluations and regular and ongoing monitoring to show whether this strategy and its action plans are improving mental health and wellbeing and assisting in suicide prevention. Monitoring and evaluation of this strategy will help us to improve our mental health and wellbeing initiatives so they better meet the needs of the Defence and veteran community.

## Governance and accountability

### Governance and accountability structure

The Defence–DVA Executive Committee is accountable to the Minister for Veterans' Affairs and Defence Personnel. This committee sets joint strategic direction for mental health and wellbeing. It is supported by the following governance and accountability structure:

- » **Defence.** The Deputy Secretary Defence People and the Chief of Personnel are the Defence accountable officers for the mental health and wellbeing strategy. They are responsible for reporting on Defence's implementation of the mental health and wellbeing strategy, including the status of action plans, emerging issues and opportunities.
- » **DVA.** The Secretary and the Deputy Secretary Policy and Programs are accountable for the mental health and wellbeing strategy in DVA. They are responsible for reporting on DVA's progress against the mental health and wellbeing strategy and action plans for veterans and their families.

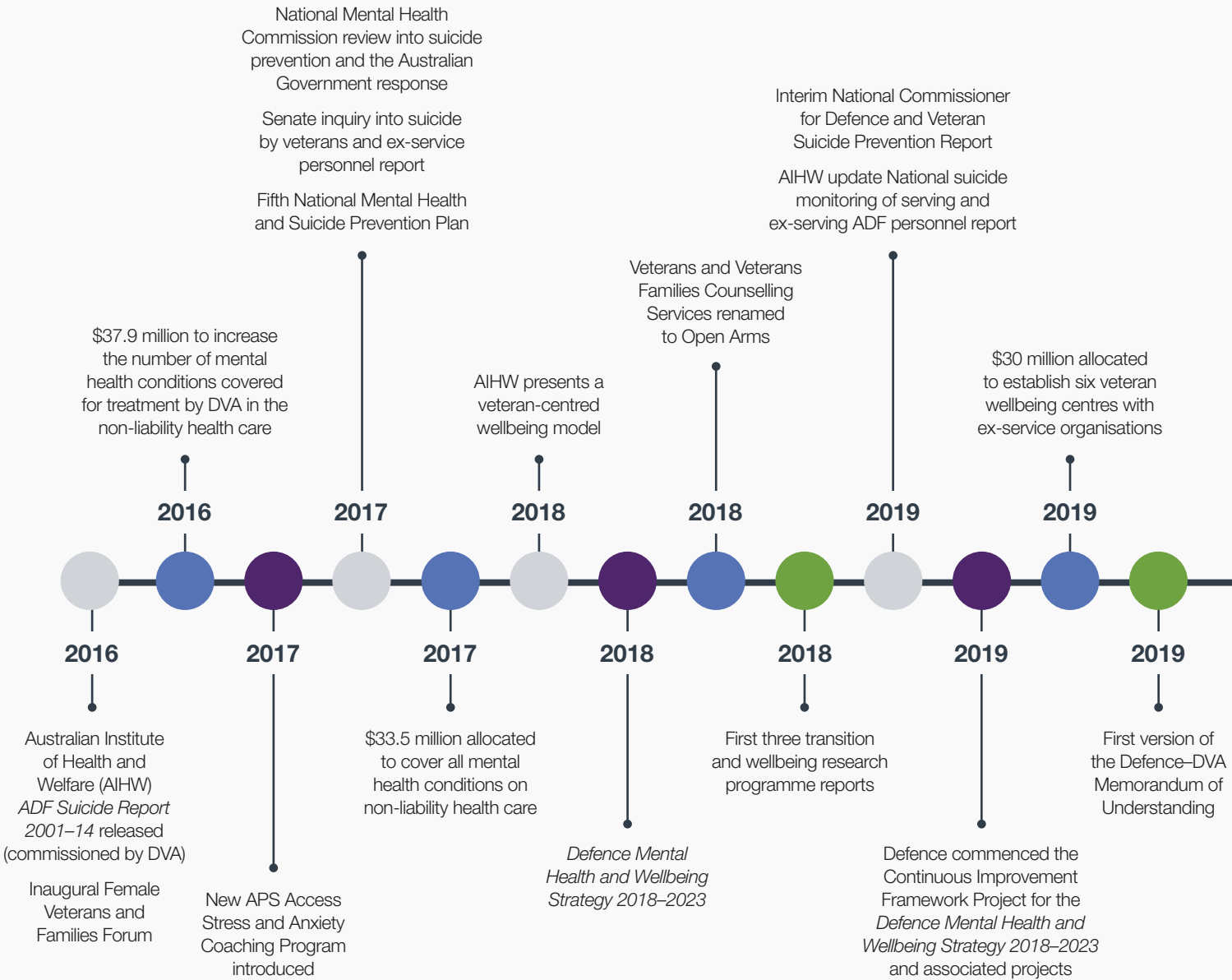
Defence and DVA each have internal entities that are responsible for implementing the strategy and providing governance and accountability on behalf of the accountable officers.

### Transparency and reporting

We recognise the importance of keeping the Defence and veteran community informed about our work on mental health and wellbeing. This strategy and its action plans will be publicly available through the Defence and DVA websites.

Defence and DVA are accountable to the Australian Government, the Australian public, and the Defence and veteran community. Each department will report on progress against this strategy and its action plans through the departmental annual reports.

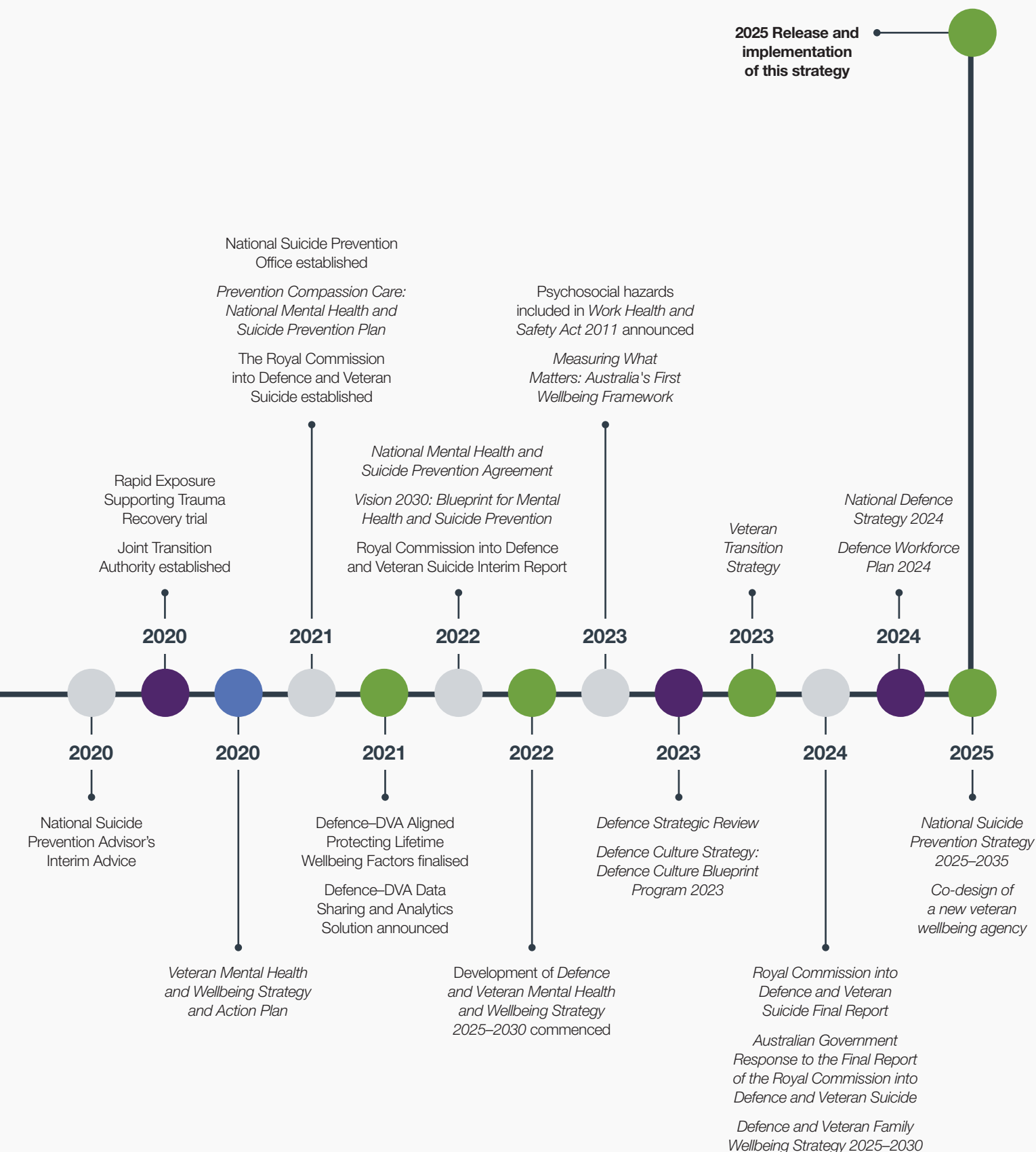
# Appendix A: Mental health reform



**Legend:**

- Australian mental health reform
- DVA
- Defence
- Defence and DVA









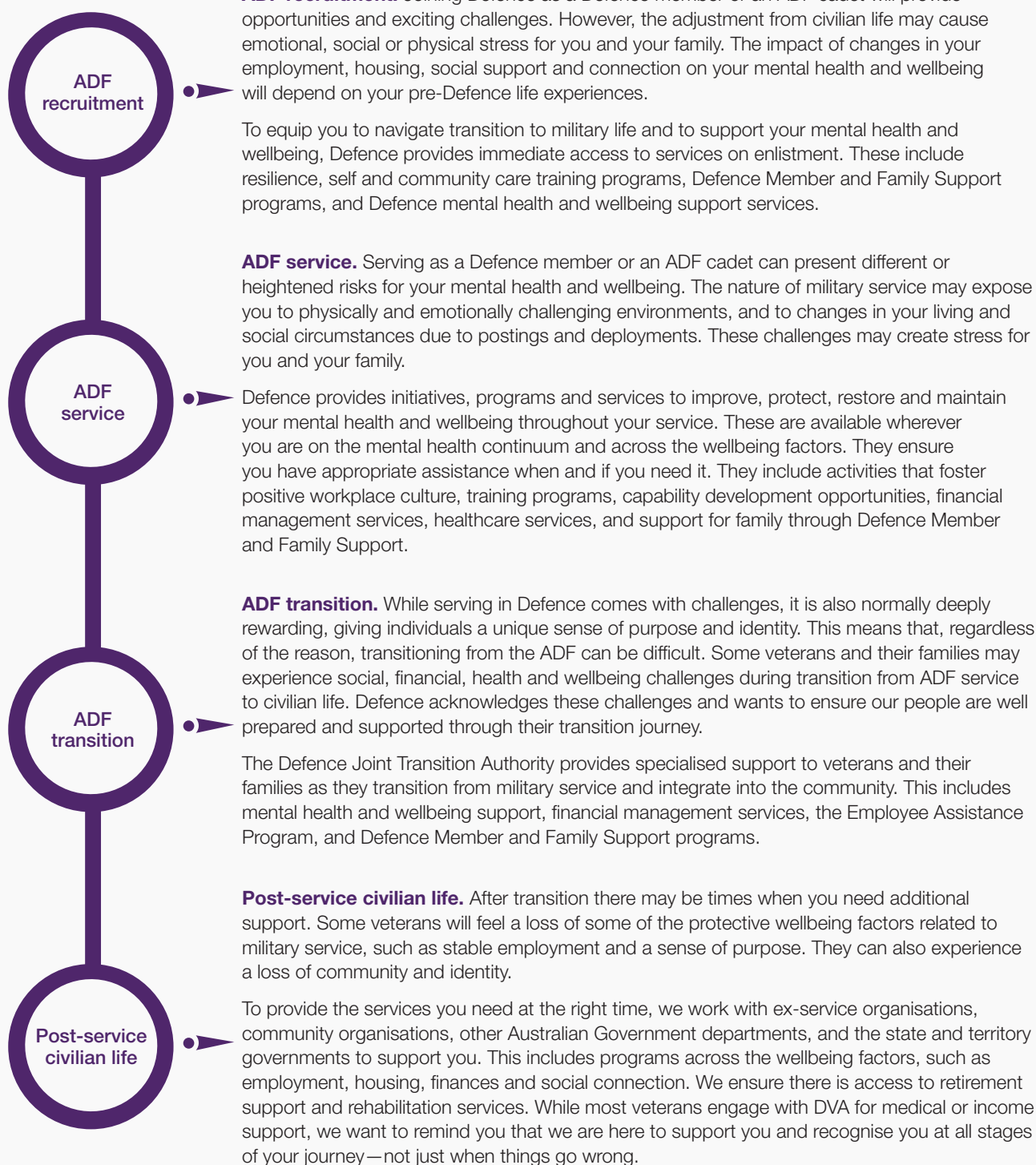


## Appendix B: Defence and veteran journey

You will experience unique health, economic, social, education, housing and spirituality challenges throughout your life. These factors are dynamic and the impact they have on you may change over time.

Defence acknowledges that you bring with you pre-determined factors and experiences from your early life when you join as a Defence member, cadet, APS employee or contractor. These experiences may influence the way you respond to the unique challenges of the Defence environment and your overall mental health and wellbeing while working for Defence.

### The ADF journey





## The APS journey



**APS recruitment.** A range of personal and environmental factors can influence your mental health and wellbeing at any time during the recruitment process. From day one of the recruitment process, Defence has mechanisms in place to support the mental health and wellbeing of APS candidates.

**APS service.** Personal, environmental and work-related factors have a role in your mental health and wellbeing. Your mental health and wellbeing are an ongoing priority. Defence has mental health and wellbeing initiatives, programs and services that exceed the requirements of the *Public Service Act 1999* and associated workplace legislation. Your mental health and wellbeing directly supports Defence capability.

**APS separation.** Several factors may contribute to how you will experience separation from Defence. The APS workforce is transient by nature, and you may experience each separation differently depending on individual, environmental and work-related factors. This includes whether the separation is temporary or permanent, voluntary or involuntary, and viewed as positive or negative.

Defence provides separation policies, procedures and supports. These prioritise your mental health and wellbeing throughout the separation process, regardless of the nature of separation.

## The contractor journey

Contractors may be exposed to personal, environmental and work-related factors throughout procurement, provision of services and on cessation of their contract with Defence. Defence strives to manage contracts and contractors in a way which is cognisant of the mental health and wellbeing of all individuals involved. Defence provides relevant supports to its contractors according to their workforce role and to complement those provided by their employer.



## Appendix C: Program logic for this strategy

**Statement:** There is a recognised need to optimise individual and collective mental health and embed positive wellbeing across the Defence and veteran community.

**Strategy vision:** Members of the Defence and veteran community are empowered and supported for optimal mental health and wellbeing during service or employment, during transition to civilian life and beyond.

<b>Inputs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>» Defence and DVA resources</li><li>» Resources for mental health and wellbeing initiatives, programs and services</li><li>» Existing research and evidence</li><li>» Stakeholder engagement</li></ul>
<b>Strategy goals</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>» Promote and assist wellbeing</li><li>» Improve mental health and wellbeing through prevention and early intervention</li><li>» Facilitate timely access to quality care and support</li><li>» Grow a positive and connected Defence and veteran community</li><li>» Prioritise suicide prevention initiatives</li><li>» Use evidence and data to drive positive outcomes</li></ul>
<b>Short-term outcomes (at 1 year)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>» Defence and DVA initiatives enhance mental health and wellbeing capability</li><li>» Increased reach of preventive mental health and wellbeing initiatives</li><li>» Increased provision and quality of mental health and wellbeing care and support</li><li>» Improved promotion of mental health and wellbeing initiatives</li><li>» Defence and DVA promote community connections</li><li>» Improved Defence and DVA collaboration to support mental health and wellbeing</li><li>» Increased investment in and prioritisation of research and evaluation</li><li>» Increased knowledge and understanding of risk and protective factors for suicide and suicidality</li></ul>
<b>Medium-term outcomes (at 3 years)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>» Increased culture of wellbeing (organisational commitment from Defence and DVA for mental health and wellbeing)</li><li>» Improved mental health and wellbeing capability</li><li>» Increased engagement in preventive mental health and wellbeing initiatives</li><li>» Increased engagement in timely, safe and quality mental health and wellbeing initiatives</li><li>» Increased social connectedness among the Defence and veteran community</li><li>» Improved knowledge translation</li><li>» Increased protective factors for suicide</li><li>» Decreased risk factors for suicide</li></ul>
<b>Long-term outcomes (at 5 years)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>» Improved Defence culture (workplace climate, retention and employee satisfaction)</li><li>» Reduced mental health stigma</li><li>» Mental health and wellbeing are embedded in Defence and DVA</li><li>» Joint evidence base of what works for optimal mental health and wellbeing</li><li>» Reduced systemic barriers to accessing care</li><li>» Reduced suicidal ideation, behaviour, distress and long-term incidence of suicide</li><li>» Improved mental health and wellbeing among the Defence and veteran community</li></ul>

## Appendix D: Sources informing this strategy

In developing this strategy, we promoted consultation opportunities. We took care to reach as many people in as many regions as possible. We:

- » consulted subject matter experts, Defence members, veterans, families, community members, and people with lived experience and diverse identities
- » consulted the Australian National Mental Health Commission, Australian National Suicide Prevention Office, government and community organisations
- » gathered feedback by email, telephone, social media and group conversations
- » conducted the YourSay Survey and the DVA Survey
- » conducted a roadshow that involved 54 interactive presentations, both online and in Defence establishments, to 2600 people across ranks, levels and employment types
- » hosted a ministerial round table for national mental health and industry experts to share professional perspectives on Defence and veteran mental health and wellbeing
- » conducted public consultation on the exposure draft of this strategy in early 2025 and received 336 responses.

We reviewed studies, academic research, government reports and international benchmarking. We also reviewed the mental health and wellbeing strategies of civilian entities, other governments and the defence forces of partner nations.

We collected and analysed health and wellbeing data from the Defence and veteran community. We reviewed the 2023 Defence Environmental Scan and the Mental Health and Wellbeing Service Delivery Horizon Scan. We considered data-informed research by external organisations.

Key documents that informed the strategy were:

- » Productivity Commission's Inquiry Report: *A Better Way to Support Veterans*
- » *Measuring What Matters National Wellbeing Framework*
- » *Productivity Commission, Mental Health, Inquiry Report*
- » *Vision 2030: Blueprint for Mental Health and Suicide Prevention*
- » *Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide Final Report*
- » *Australian Government Response to the Final Report of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide*
- » *National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement*
- » *National Defence Strategy 2024*
- » *Veteran Transition Strategy*
- » *Defence Work Health and Safety Strategy 2023–2028*
- » *ADF Health Strategy*
- » Australian Institute of Health and Welfare reports
- » *Defence Workforce Plan 2024*
- » *Defence Culture Strategy: Defence Culture Blueprint Program 2023*
- » *Defence and Veteran Family Wellbeing Strategy 2025–2030*
- » *National Suicide Prevention Strategy 2025–2035*





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**Australian Government**

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**Department of Defence**

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**Department of Veterans' Affairs**