

Australian Public Service Employee Census 2025-26 – Defence Action Plan

Celebrate Engagement and commitment – The Defence workforce is committed to the Department, our purpose and mission. Our workforce suggest ideas for improvement and have a strong sense of pride for the work we do. We go the extra mile and are satisfied with our non-monetary employment conditions. Clarity, Autonomy and Flexible Work – Our workforce values flexibility and are given autonomy to choose how they work. They understand how their role contributes to achieving outcomes for the Australian public.	Continued Focus Unacceptable behaviour –Active steps must be taken to eliminate unacceptable behaviour and ensure that staff feel supported to report bullying, harassment and discrimination in the workplace. Leadership – Improved leadership results for SES managers and stabilisation of immediate manager results is positive. However, there is more work to do. A strong leadership focus will continue to build a strong, inclusive, flexible and respectful culture.	Opportunities Communication and Change – We need to improve how we manage change and how the impacts are communicated. It is important that change is managed and communicated well. Change must be supported by our senior leaders to bring meaning and purpose. Wellbeing and Psychosocial Safety –We need to enable our workforce to foster physically and psychologically safe teams. This involves strengthening wellbeing factors, minimising risk, including the identification and management of psychosocial hazards.
--	---	--

Goals	Actions	Due	Action Lead ¹	Review	Success Indicator ²
1. Promote and assist wellbeing	Implement the Defence Culture Blueprint Action Plan, including actions to deliver the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide (RCDVS), review and update accordingly.	Continuous	First Assistant Secretary, Workforce and People Strategy	Deputy Secretary Defence People Group	Reporting to the Culture and Diversity Steering Group and Defence committees on the status of implementation demonstrates progress on embedding actions.
	Implement the Defence and Veteran Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2025-2030 and Action Plans.	Continuous	First Assistant Secretary, People Services and Wellbeing	Deputy Secretary Defence People Group	The implementation status and achievement of short, medium, and long-term outcomes are aligned with the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework.
	Actively promote and communicate Work Health and Safety and wellbeing offerings and resources to all employees.	Q4 2026	First Assistant Secretary, People Services and Wellbeing	Deputy Secretary Defence People Group	Defence culture contributes positively to individual, team, and organisational resilience and wellbeing. This is reflected in improved APS Census results. Enterprise policies and initiatives are interconnected through the Defence Culture Blueprint and the Defence and Veterans Mental Health and Wellbeing Action Plan. Senior leaders model wellbeing support and endorse and participate in key campaigns including RUOK Day and Mental Health Month. In the 2026 Defence APS Census results we see an upwards trend in the Wellbeing Policies and Support Index Score with perceptions of Defence doing ‘a good job of promoting health and wellbeing’ increasing.
	Improve early intervention strategies to support supervisors manage wellbeing and reduce stigma.	Q3 2026	First Assistant Secretary, People Services and Wellbeing	Deputy Secretary Defence People Group	Evaluate outcomes from the Defence and Veteran Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2025-2030. Communicate progress to better inform future policy and program design across Defence.
	Create opportunities to improve approaches to peer support and mentoring.	Q4 2026	First Assistant Secretary, People Policy and Development	Deputy Secretary Defence People Group	Individuals have the tools and knowledge to promote mental health and wellbeing, reflected in improvements to the 2026 Defence APS Census Wellbeing Policies and Support Index.
	Develop a “Wellbeing Portal” as a central repository with clear and easy to access information about: - EAP and mental health services; - Vicarious and secondary trauma; - Early intervention services; - Resilience and mindfulness sessions; and - Health and Safety Representatives.	Q4 2026	First Assistant Secretary, People Services and Wellbeing	Deputy Secretary Defence People Group	Launch of a centralised digital portal to enhance visibility and access to mental health support services. Demonstrated improvement in the following Wellbeing elements in the 2026 APS Census:

¹ Note while DPG are responsible for leading the actions to ensure they are implemented appropriately, all SES and Star Ranks are responsible for improving Defence culture and the employee experience within their Groups and Services.

² All proposed indicators are in addition to improving Australian Public Service Census results in 2026 and beyond.



Defence

Goals	Actions	Due	Action Lead ¹	Review	Success Indicator ²
					- Communication of Health and Wellbeing policies, practices and services available to employees - Support and promotion of an inclusive workplace culture - Respect I deserve from colleagues
2. Create a safe and accountable workplace where individuals feel confident to report unacceptable behaviour, supported by proactive measures to prevent incidents and promote a respectful culture.	Establish a Complaint, Resolution and Support Services Unit designed to accept unacceptable behaviour and anonymous complaint outside of line management/chain of command.	Q1 2026	First Assistant Secretary, People Services and Wellbeing	Deputy Secretary Defence People Group	Our people feel safe to report matters through available mechanisms. Decrease in the percentage of people choosing not to report unacceptable behaviour in the 2026 APS Employee Census results.
	The new Complaint, Resolution and Support Services Unit will strengthen internal communication on Defence Values and Behaviours, ensuring clear guidance on reporting, addressing, and monitoring unacceptable behaviour.	Q3 2026	First Assistant Secretary, People Services and Wellbeing	Deputy Secretary Defence People Group	Our people are confident to express themselves and feel safe to contribute. Positive or stabilisation of unacceptable behaviour indicators. Decrease in severity of unacceptable behaviour incidents over time and use of internal reporting systems.
	Update both the mandatory values and behaviours training, and induction training to place a greater emphasis on: - the importance of leading and acting in accordance with the APS Values and Code of Conduct; - what constitutes unacceptable behaviour (e.g. bullying, harassment, exclusion); - bystander intervention skills; and - psychosocial safety and respectful communication.	Q4 2026	First Assistant Secretary, People Services and Wellbeing; and First Assistant Secretary People Policy and Development	Deputy Secretary Defence People Group	Improved 2026 Leadership and Working in the APS results in the APS Employee APS Census. Achieve stabilisation or improvement in unacceptable behaviour indicators in the 2026 APS Employee Census, with a reduction in severity of reported incidents and an increase in the number of personnel reporting they feel safe to speak up, contribute, and be themselves. Increased participation and completion rates in mandated training demonstrate a strengthened culture of respect and accountability.
3. Enhance manager capability and awareness to proactively lead and engage in consultation and change management	All Senior Executive Service and Star Ranks are provided with information on consultation obligations outlined in the <i>Defence Enterprise Collective Agreement 2024</i> when leading change.	Q4 2026	First Assistant Secretary, People Services and Wellbeing First Assistant Secretary Workforce and People Strategy	Deputy Secretary Defence People Group	Senior leaders work together as a team to articulate the Defence mission and objectives. Senior leaders are provided with, and have access to, appropriate tools and materials to understand consultation obligations to lead and support change in a safe and effective way. Improved 2026 APS Employee Census results against change and communication indices.
	Promote resources and tools to educate our people on their obligations to manage change in accordance with the <i>Defence Enterprise Collective Agreement 2024</i> .	Q4 2026	First Assistant Secretary, People Services and Wellbeing First Assistant Secretary, Workforce and People Strategy	Deputy Secretary Defence People Group	Use of corporately funded courses targeting communication and change management. Managers demonstrate increased confidence and competence in leading change through improved consultation practices. Reduced psychosocial risks linked to poor organisational change. Improved results in 2026 APS Employee Census across the change and communication indices.

4. Strengthen leadership capabilities at all levels of our workforce to foster a culture of accountability, inclusion, and psychological safety	Implement the Defence Leadership Framework to support the Defence Workforce Plan 2024-2034 and provide a common approach to leadership, articulating the attributes that are expected of all leaders in Defence.	Q4 2026	First Assistant Secretary, People Policy and Development	Deputy Secretary Defence People Group	Increased participation in corporately funded leadership programs. Improved 2026 APS Employee Census results on leadership for immediate and SES managers.
	Embed inclusive leadership behaviours into performance frameworks and require leaders to model accountability and psychological safety through regular team check-ins, transparent decision-making, and open feedback channels.	Q4 2026	First Assistant Secretary, People Policy and Development	Deputy Secretary Defence People Group	Increase in employee perception of psychological safety and inclusion, measured through APS Employee Census or pulse survey results
5. Improve communication of key messages to the workforce	Continue the conduct of in person and virtual forums where members of the Senior Leadership Group share updates and receive feedback on issues affecting the workplace.	Continuous	Office of the Secretary	Secretary of the Department of Defence	The workforce will receive up to six opportunities per year to hear from the Secretary. Senior leaders across the workforce engage regularly with staff and have access to updated tools, and materials to enable effective communication.
	Promote communication and manager capability training.	Continuous	First Assistant Secretary, Ministerial and Executive Coordination First Assistant Secretary, People Policy and Development	Deputy Secretary Governance	Improved uptake of relevant training. Improved 2026 APS Employee Census results against internal communication indices.