



A word from Gwen



COVID, travel restrictions, and home schooling may have put a damper on some of my plans over the last three months, but a heap of work has still been happening. I attended a number of openings, conferences and forums, and continued my consultations with the community. I met with Minister Gee a number of times and have communicated the importance of engaging and supporting families in their own right, among other issues families have raised. As you may know,

my role is focused on advocacy, strategy, policy and programs. A new member has joined my office from the Triage and Connect team to complete assessments and link veterans and families who are in contact with the VFA Office to support services within and external to DVA. This addition has allowed me to focus my efforts on a number of consultations to advise government on programs and services for families, bereaved, carers, parents, children, youth and those affected by domestic and family violence. Additionally, my fortnightly meetings with Christine Morgan, National Mental Health Commission (NMHC) CEO and the Prime Minister's Suicide Prevention Advisor, ensures she is informed of emerging issues in the veteran and family community and that our community can learn from her work. The next three months are jam packed with events, meetings, and consultations – and hopefully a little travel. Stay safe and be kind to yourselves.

Preliminary Interim Report from the Interim National Commissioner on Defence and Veteran Suicides

On 29 September, Dr Bernadette Boss CSC's report was tabled in Parliament. Dr Boss conducted extensive research and engaged serving and ex-serving defence members, families, community organisations, experts and government bodies to obtain a greater understanding based on their personal stories and feedback. The report provides thoughtful insights and 41 recommendations. It highlights areas in need of improvement, provides positive outcomes which have been achieved in recent years and gives me hope that things are improving. The report will be passed on to the Royal Commission so that her work can be continued.

AIHW

The fourth annual Australian Institute of Health and Wellbeing (AIHW) report was released on 29 September 2021. The figures are higher than previously reported. This is partly due to a wider cohort of veterans with one or more days of service since 1985 being included in the report. The report reinforces what we knew regarding at-risk and vulnerable cohorts and ensures we continue to build understanding. This work helps shape preventative programs and confirms that the initiatives established over the last few years are on the right track, but there is no doubt there is still much to do.

IASP World Congress

Co-presented at the International Association for Suicide Prevention with Christine Morgan, the Prime Minister's Advisor for Suicide Prevention on the importance of including lived experience in policy and program development and the experience of veterans and families.

National Summit on Women's Safety 2021

On 6&7 September 2021, I attended the National Summit as a delegate, bringing together a range of experts to explore issues faced by women and their children experiencing violence in Australia. Thank you to all those individuals and organisations who advised me and answered my call to make submissions to the next National Action Plan seeking Defence and veteran families be acknowledged as a cohort in our own right.

DVA Families Working Group

Established a DVA staff working group including policy, service delivery, commemorations and other areas that engage with or provide services to veteran families.

Key Statistics to Date

More than **10,500** interactions with veterans and families, veteran organisations, government representatives and others.

Visited **ACT, NSW, QLD, SA, WA, NT** and **TAS**
Attended more than **870** scheduled meetings

Events

State and Territory Visits

Every Drop Shed in Anguish

On 16 June 2021 The Australian War Memorial announced the Sufferings of War and Service sculpture called Every Drop Shed in Anguish.

The marble droplets will represent blood, sweat and tears and will be a powerful way for veterans and families to reflect on both the physical and mental wounds of war and service - both seen and unseen. Further information can be found at [Sufferings of War and Service | Australian War Memorial \(awm.gov.au\)](https://www.awm.gov.au/sufferings-of-war-and-service)

Fussell House Opening

Fussell House at Concord Repatriation Hospital in Sydney officially opened on 18 June 2021, named in honour of the late Lieutenant Michael Fussell.

The residential accommodation facility provides veterans *and* their families with a home as they access comprehensive mental and physical health services at the world-class National Centre for Veterans' Healthcare (NCVH). For more information visit [SLHD National Centre for Veterans' Healthcare](https://www.slhd.nsw.gov.au/national-centre-for-veterans-healthcare)

Some Other Events of Note

- Legacy Australia's National Advocacy Forum
- Carers consultation
- Expert Advisory Group, ACSQHC's input to the Independent Review of Past Defence and Veteran Suicides
- Lived-experience Peer Workshop with Christine Morgan, NMHC and Open Arms
- Australian Catholic University recognition of prior learning launch 'Recognising Veterans at ACU'

Hobart (June)

Meetings included:

- DVA office visit
- The Regional Advisory Forum
- TAS Deputy Commissioner Luke Brown
- ESO's including Soldier On, Partners of Veterans Australia, Legacy - Hobart & Launceston, Buddy Up and Mates4Mates
- Local government officials including The Hon Guy Barnett MP, Minister for Veterans' Affairs and Kate Kent Deputy Secretary Communities Sport & Recreation

Brisbane (June)

Meetings included:

- The Regional Advisory Forum
- Open Arms Community Engagement Team Consultation
- Defence Engagement Commissioner Stuart Smith
- QLD Deputy Commissioner Tara Hatzismalis
- DVA Brisbane office, Open Arms and the Clinical Assist team