

Men's Health PEER EDUCATION

THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS
promoting healthy lifestyles for Australia's veterans



SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS ISSUE

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SOCIAL CONNECTION
participate connect influence

Get Connected during VETERANS' HEALTH WEEK 2016

Social Connection, the relationship people have with others, is the theme of Veterans' Health Week 2016, which will run from Saturday, 22 October to Sunday, 30 October.

Social connection includes relationships with family, friends, colleagues and neighbours, as well as connections people make through paid or unpaid work, volunteering, sport and other leisure activities.

Get inspired, take part in activities and gain the information you need to think about things related to your health and lifestyle.



Benefits of joining a social group

Regularly connecting with people is an important part of a fulfilling and healthy lifestyle. It is widely accepted that positive social connection is essential for physical and psychological health, wellbeing and survival. Relative to socially isolated individuals, socially connected people live longer and are less likely to suffer from depression, anxiety and have a higher resilience in response to stressful life events and environments.

Physical Activity and Social Connection

There is an endless list of health benefits in being active, but did you know it is also good for developing a sense of belonging? The benefits of an active lifestyle go far beyond increased energy, weight control and reduced risk of cardiovascular disease. It can also help boost mood, mental health and social connections. Further, it is fundamental to helping us belong and be connected, which are intrinsic to health and wellbeing.

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Volunteering and Social Connection

Social connectedness is a core aspect of volunteering, with participation in voluntary roles often enabling people to expand their networks and meet new people. Volunteering allows people to fulfil a meaningful and positive role in which they can develop new skills, gain a sense of achievement and increase career options. Our society often underestimates the power of feeling connected with others, overlooking the severe effects social isolation has on many individuals in Australia.

WANTED MHPE VOLUNTEERS!

Turn to page 28 for information on the MHPE program.

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editorial



Sandra Jenkins

Welcome to the Social Connectedness issue.

Grabbing my running shoes and going for a jog is a bit of a pastime of mine. Being a busy Mum, I enjoy the freedom to spend time with my thoughts while acquiring my dose of exercise.

However, rather than jog alone, I recently decided to participate in my local 'Park Run'. This is a free weekly 5km timed run that is accessible to everybody in the community and I thought I would 'give it a go'.

The first thing I noticed was the social connections and inclusiveness of the participants. There were folk of all ages and abilities. Some were members of running groups, while others were local friends catching up. There were families coming together and there were also community members who formed part of the volunteer team.

All shared a common goal and I discovered a real sense of community and belonging just by being there. This also contributed to me enjoying the run all the more and having that extra 'spring' in my step. I'm now a regular 'Park Runner' and have started to see the same familiar faces each week.

Sandra Jenkins National Coordinator Men's Health Peer Education

I think we all long to be a part of a group. That sense of belonging and establishing relationships is sometimes taken for granted. Even if it is just a passing smile or a 'hello', it can make all the difference to your day.

Do you sometimes feel 'off' on days when you haven't been able to connect with community members, friends or family? Staying in touch is not only good for the soul but is also good for your overall health and wellbeing.

In this issue, we explore some of the ways to become involved and socially connect. Whether it be work, volunteering, being part of a social group, learning through education and training or accessing your local community resources, having these important connections makes for a fuller life.

This year, Veterans' Health Week takes place from Saturday 22 October to Sunday 30 October and the theme is 'Social Connection'. This presents a perfect opportunity to get involved in your local community. MHPE volunteers and ex-service

organisations will be holding a range of events and encouraging members of the veteran community to think about the importance of social connection for their health and wellbeing.

2016 marks the 15th anniversary of the MHPE program. So as well as congratulating the MHPE volunteers who will achieve five and 10 years of service, for the first time we are also recognising those who have been with the program since inception – 15 years. What a fantastic milestone! I'd like to thank you all for your contribution, enthusiasm and support for the program.

While reading this magazine, if you are thinking what it would be like to become a MHPE volunteer, there is more information on the back page regarding the program and how to become a volunteer.

I hope that the articles in this issue inspire you to get involved and that you encourage your friends, family and acquaintances to be part of the activities in Veterans' Health Week 2016!

Letters to the Editor

What we're looking for ...

Letters should be no more than 100 words and relate to articles or topics discussed in the magazine or regarding men's health generally

Please send your letters to The Editor at
menshealth@dva.gov.au, or

Men's Health Peer Education magazine
c/- Department of Veterans' Affairs
GPO Box 9998
Sydney NSW 2001

MHPE MAGAZINE AND REPRODUCTION OF CONTENT

Just a reminder to our readers, if you would like to include an article that's appeared in an edition of the magazine in your own publication, please contact the Editor to confirm if there are any restrictions on the re-publication of the material.

MHPE MAGAZINE EDITORIAL COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Sandra Jenkins DVA (Editor)

Dr Warren Harrex, DVA Senior Medical Adviser

Amelia Blenkin, Acting DVA Mental Health Adviser

Anthony Hoare, DVA National Health Adviser

Margaret Bennett, VVCS

Raylee Huggett, DVA, Public Affairs



Link up and stay free

I took a call from a much-loved cousin last week. After sharing family news she told me about her recent successes in writing and publishing teaching material for music students. She said how good it was to be able to work in her own place for most of the time. Sitting in my own home office I could share and echo her feelings exactly. We recalled our many family members who have sought out solitary workstyles or run one-man businesses.

I reminded her of a line from our Sunday school days '... you in your small corner, and I in mine', as we each sat, very happily, in the small corners of our work places. Alone we were, but in that moment not isolated or unconnected.

Professor Dan Siegel, University of California, states 'isolation is an artificial prison'. He cites quantum physics (ouch!) as demonstrating that everything is connected to everything else and asks, 'what is wrong with the human brain that we believe we are separate from each other?' Siegel says it becomes harder to escape the isolation goal as we spend less time interacting with other people and natural things and more time with phones and computer screens.

Does this matter? The end result, says Professor Siegel, is that lots of us become chronically lonely, with increasing risks to our physical and mental health. We also lose the capacity for fellow-feeling, so necessary for sustaining a kind and compassionate society. As we watch local and world events (ok, on our digital devices) it seems that Siegel may be onto something.

'Connectedness' and interaction with people, feelings and the natural world may not be a comfortable notion for some of us, where will this lead us? But many people feel that they do not 'belong' anywhere particular anymore, or that they never did.

My much-loved cousin had rung me about the passing of the last of our very elderly aunts. This was no tragedy for any of us. It did mean there would be a gathering of our wider family. We would share memories common to all of us, and learn extra things about people special to us. We would meet around food and wine and know that we were among people who were like us in so many ways: connecting and connected.

I am extremely fortunate to have a wider family like that. Siegel suggests that we can all get some of this, and without too much touchy-feely weirdness. How? By reminding ourselves that no matter how much time we spend solo, we are all part of a family, of a tribe, of a common and shared world, in short, that we belong. And also by practising making small connections, a friendly word here, a renewed contact there, even just a cheeky grin in passing, with people and events in our daily lives.

Dr Tony Ireland, DVA Medical Adviser

Welcome to the Black Dog Ride family

Black Dog Ride began in 2009 as one man's ride to raise awareness of depression and has developed into a national suicide prevention charity involving thousands of Australian motorcycle riders.

Victorian *Black Dog Ride* co-ordinator, Ric Raftis describes in this article what it's like being part of the *Black Dog Ride* family.

'It's a huge step for many to make that initial phone call to be part of the *Black Dog Ride*. You hear it in their voice, anxiety mixed with uncertainty,' Ric said.

'They ask about the ride, distances, accommodation and other valid questions. This is the tentative first step in undertaking a major motorcycle ride of thousands of kilometres in the company of people they don't know. Sometimes the enquirer has isolated themselves for a long time.

'You can always pick the "newbie" on ride day. That's a handy thing, as many of the old hands will approach and welcome them. There's registration to deal with and people to meet. It can be somewhat intimidating until you're out on the road. That's when the aloneness of

being a rider and the camaraderie of the group come together.

'First night on the road is usually a bit of a party as the more experienced riders catch up with one another, sometimes after a twelve month break. Everyone keeps an eye on the newcomers and encourages them to get involved. It's really important to all *Black Dog Ride* participants that this period of bonding and getting to know one another begins on the first night.'

What draws people in the first place?

'The common factor is a love of motorcycles and riding,' Ric said. 'Whilst other experiences may have some commonality, it is the bike that ties us together. It's not long before you find that every rider has been touched in some way by a mental health issue or suicide in themselves or those around them. We are all different and yet we are all the same.

'Sooner or later people open up and tell their stories. This is often helped by the more experienced riders sharing their lives with others in conversation at a fuel stop or perhaps over dinner.

'As the journey progresses, the newer riders don't feel alone. They begin to

realise that they are amongst friends, people who truly understand what it's like to go through what they have been through.

'The change is often quite amazing as people open up to one another and form smaller riding groups on the road. There seems to be a natural tendency for people to find those they are best suited to and this is often the beginning of lifelong friendships.'

Ric said as the ride continues the camaraderie builds and by the third or fourth night on the road it really is a tight, well-oiled team.

'Everyone knows one another and relies on each other on the road,' Ric said.

'The night of our group's final briefing before we meet up with hundreds of riders from other states the following day is the time I enjoy as we welcome all the new riders to the *Black Dog Ride* family.

'We have become a family looking after each other both on and off the road. Bonds have formed that can never be broken. Never again will any of these riders feel alone.

'That is the beauty of family,' Ric said.

Text and image by Ric Raftis.

Black Dog Ride raises awareness of depression, suicide prevention and mental health by creating conversations. As part of their work they also raise money for mental health services around the country. Further information on *Black Dog Ride* can be found at www.blackdogride.com.au



Black Dog Riders at Uluru

RETRAIN to RE-CONNECT with life

From active service to civilian life

I joined the Navy in 1984 and served for just over five years. When I resigned in 1989 for medical and psychological reasons, I knew I was facing a career change.

I decided to take up the challenge of becoming a self-employed restaurateur. However, years following the closure of the restaurant venture, my employment opportunities were reduced further due to a failing knee condition.

Not in a good space

It was thanks to my family's support, I was able to work flexible hours in a local business for a while to help me with my worsening health conditions. Other short-term jobs followed. I was also on sickness benefits and later retrenched. I did not know what to do, and for over 16 years, I remained out of the workforce.

When I turned 40, I suffered a minor heart attack, and shortly after, I had surgery on my failing knee. That same year, I lost my partner of 16 years. What followed was a period of grieving. Substance and alcohol abuse led to very low points in my life. Bouts of depression meant forgoing hope for the future. I was not in a good space. It was a very, very traumatic time for me.

Turning point

The support and services I've received from the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) have been absolutely terrific. Everyone has been cooperative and helpful. The rehabilitation service provider organised by DVA understood my circumstances and organised suitable vocational training. They prepared me for return to work in a job I can actually do and will be able to continue doing without putting too much pressure on me.

After completing my course in 2012, I decided to do volunteering with an organisation called 2&5 Inc. (two servings of fruit and five servings of vegetables per day). 2&5 Inc supplies cheaper fresh fruit and vegetables sourced from local growers. This opportunity led to a job offer. Now I am active for up to 25 hours per week, managing the 2&5 Fresh shopfront for two-and-a-half days a week. My boss is happy, my doctor is happy, and I'm happy.

Jason Brown



Jason Brown

A positive future – how DVA worked with Jason

A realistic and goal-focused rehabilitation plan developed by DVA helped Jason get back on track.

His vocation-oriented rehabilitation assessment identified the need for accredited training combined with work trial placement. Jason successfully completed a computing course which included MYOB, Excel and PowerPoint.

In December 2012, Jason gained a Certificate II Warehousing & Logistics from Gordon Institute (TAFE). With a forklift operator's licence and a current Certificate II in First Aid also in hand, Jason was ready to look for employment opportunities.

After more than 16 years away from the workforce, Jason was once again employed and part of the local community.

His new job has helped him gain a sense of purpose and value, and importantly, is sustainable and within his capabilities.

For more DVA Rehabilitation Success Stories, please visit www.dva.gov.au/health-and-wellbeing/rehabilitation/rehabilitation-success-stories

You're never too old to learn something new

Learning is an excellent way to make social connections with many still connected to friends made in primary or high school years.

While education is often viewed as a formal process, completing various levels that could include high school education, vocational studies or undergraduate or graduate studies, there is now, more than ever, an acknowledgement that we continue to learn both formally and informally throughout our lives.

Learning helps keep the brain active and, while we may have to acknowledge that there are some things we can't learn or are physically unable to do, most of us can learn a variety of new skills, and age should not be a barrier.

Learning new skills can also assist in updating your qualifications or changing career.

Outside of work, learning is also the opportunity to attempt to fulfil a life-long ambition and learn something new, such as how to play a musical instrument, paint or draw, become a potter, cook creatively or undertake that once in a lifetime experience such as parachuting or bungee jumping.

In Australia, as well as access to public, private and vocational education systems, we also have access to significant opportunities to undertake both short and long-term study, learn new skills or just enhance the skills we have.

The opportunities are boundless. You could learn something new, such as how to play Bridge or paint a bridge like Monet.

Take the first step and see what is available in your community, through your local council or a University of the 3rd Age may well have a structured program of learning activities.



TAFE colleges have a great range of programs and may offer single subjects if you don't want to complete a whole course, or have your previous experience recognised to reduce the number of subjects required to complete a course.

You can also join a club (try Facebook) or a meetup group (www.meetup.com) in your area and of specific interest to you.

While online learning does not assist you with being physically connected, there are many universities in Australia and overseas producing short free courses anyone can undertake, with some using online forums to keep the students and teaching staff connected as they discuss their common study interest.

If there is something you really would like to try, then take that first step, because you are never too old to learn something new.

Jeff Fairweather, DVA

Connecting with a mate can help reduce their risk of social isolation and suicide

Tony Hoare, DVA National Health Adviser

Suicide is one of the leading causes of death in Australian men (ABS 2016). However, as a mate you can help by identifying the signs of suicide, starting the conversation early and linking your mate into appropriate help.

By recognising the signs and intervening early, you may help to reduce the risk of suicide.

A group of Australian men who have survived a suicide attempt, together with their friends and families, have provided some valuable insights into the actions others took that made a difference.

Working with researchers from the Black Dog Institute, this group debunked the stereotype of men not talking about their emotions. The Black Dog Institute found:

- 90 per cent said support from someone they trust and respect was important in interrupting a suicide attempt; and
- 80 per cent emphasised the value of having someone genuinely listen.

'I want to know that people still placed some value on my friendship or my interaction in their life or whatever ... come and say hey, we love you. We love who you are.'
(Interview participant, male, 37).

A good mate can be crucial to starting the conversation and getting their friend on the road to help.

When you are worried about someone you care about it can be hard to know how to offer them help. Some of the ways listed below have been shown to help:

1. Noticing changes in their behaviour and mood, such as a loss of interest in activities, engaging in risky activities, giving away possessions, increasing alcohol or drug use, anger, or withdrawing from others.
2. Expressing your concerns, listening to them without judgement and reassuring them that you care. It will be difficult to ask the hard question 'Are you thinking of suicide?' but you might be the only person who asks. It is a myth that by asking about suicide it will put the idea into their head. The best possible outcome is they say, 'no'.
3. However, if it is a 'yes', together choose an appropriate support person. This might be their doctor or a counsellor. Offer to book the appointment or go along with them. Don't leave the person alone.
4. If you get the 'brush off' but remain concerned, persevere with your support. Movember Foundation's

Jeremy Macvean said, 'Men (who are suicidal) want their spiralling mood to be noticed, but may reject offers of support from family and friends, who reported the importance of persisting.'

5. Use distractions, practical and emotional support. The men concerned said distraction didn't fix the problem, but it gave them a break from suicidal thoughts.
6. Talk to someone else about your concerns, such as a health professional or helpline. It is important to offer them help, but equally important to look after yourself.
7. Learn more about mental health and suicide prevention.

There is no one way to prevent suicide, nor is there a 'one size fits all' approach to help those in need. However, your help could make a real difference in a mate's life.

The Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service (VVCS) offers suicide awareness and prevention workshops Australia-wide to anyone concerned about someone in the ex-service community. Known as *Operation Life*, these free workshops equip people with the tools and confidence to recognise and promptly act on concerns about suicide.

As part of the 2016–17 Budget, the Government has provided ongoing funding for Operation Life workshops. For more information on Operation Life workshops, please visit www.vvcs.gov.au/Services/GroupPrograms/operation-life.htm

Complementary suicide awareness and prevention resources include the Operation Life website and mobile phone app. To access these useful resources please visit at-ease.dva.gov.au/suicideprevention

For more information on the research mentioned in this article, see Black Dog Institute www.blackdoginstitute.org.au

VVCS can be reached 24 hours a day for crisis support and free and confidential counselling. Phone 1800 011 046 or visit www.vvcs.gov.au

Physical activity and social connection



Heart Health Program Greensborough

There is an endless list of health benefits in being active, but did you know it is also good for developing a sense of belonging?

The benefits of an active lifestyle go far beyond increased energy, weight control and reduced risk of cardiovascular disease. It can also help boost mood, mental health and social connections. Further, it is fundamental to helping us belong and be connected, which are intrinsic to health and wellbeing.

For many, society today can be isolating. There are many reasons why we become isolated. Whether it's through lack of motivation, social networks, mental health or lack of finances, feeling alone can be debilitating.

So how can we break this difficult cycle?

Introducing, or maintaining regular physical activity into your weekly schedule is a simple way to break the isolation cycle.

Physical activity not only introduces you to a new circle of people, but stimulates the release of endorphins known as the 'feel good' hormones. With endorphins flowing and a renewed sense of self (due to the physical health benefits of exercise), confidence and self-esteem will improve, resulting in a new positive cycle of social interaction and activity.

Being active can also have the added benefit of strengthening existing relationships as energy levels and wellbeing increase, many people could be more inclined to reach out and reconnect.

Physical activity often lends itself to a social environment and joining a local walking group (or other group of interest) is an ideal first step in developing a support network. It's through the establishment of new friendships, a sense of belonging develops. Being a part of a group may also assist in limiting feelings of loneliness while assisting in maintaining a consistent routine while looking forward to regular activity and with a new circle of friends.

The Heart Health Program is a great example, offering participants the opportunity to be physically active within a social setting. Funded by the Department of Veterans' Affairs, this 12-month program gives veterans a healthy mix of enjoyable exercise.

Whether you prefer to exercise with a group or on your own, the benefits of living an active lifestyle are clear, exercise improves your overall health and wellbeing.

Should you be interested in learning more about the relationship between physical activity and connecting with those in your community, contact the **Heart Health Program** on **1300 246 262**.

Barry found the social environment of the Heart Health Program to be a key component of his success. *'We all got to learn more about each other and soon I felt we had become good friends. This was important as we all, from time to time, needed support and encouragement, and someone to talk to ... As the months went by, I found that I really enjoyed the physical activity and looked forward to the sessions each week.'*

Supportive relationships forged during the shared experience of physical activity in the Heart Health Program, were key contributing factors resulting in an improved quality of life for veteran Bill. *'After years of total social isolation, depression and PTSD ... I joined the Heart Health Program and after a short time ... my personal relationships improved 200 per cent, my mental health improved significantly, my interpersonal skills improved...'*

GROWING TOGETHER

July 2015 was an exciting time for the Copper Coast Vietnam Veterans' Association (CCVVA) – South Australia (SA). They gathered a small group of gardening enthusiasts to form a garden committee with the aim of working together to establish a herb and vegetable garden.

Peter Petherick (Pedro) made contact with Margie Gutteridge (VAN Community Support Manager) to discuss the idea and Margie informed him that this type of initiative may be funded through a DVA Health & Wellbeing application.

The committee met regularly and conducted research into the 'health benefits' of growing certain herbs and vegetables. They also researched 'companion planting' and 'herbs for tough times'.

Companion planting refers to the careful placement of plants which support the growth of other plants, however feedback from the committee suggests it could also refer to mates getting their hands dirty together whilst connecting socially and enjoying one another's companionship. The garden committee members grew close to one another through this shared interest and excitement at the prospect of establishing a club garden.

After partnering with SA's Community Support Adviser, Neil Davies, an application was written and submitted and the CCVVA were successful in obtaining \$2000 in funding towards creating a garden and for purchasing five large garden beds. This achievement and success bonded the gardening committee and other members.

Work started at a fast pace as the CCVVA had plans to launch the garden during Veterans' Health Week (VHW) 2015. The VHW event was a huge success with lots of promotion and support from the local community.

Despite a very hot summer, produce such as radishes, peas, silver beet, tomatoes and herbs was harvested and used during social events, such as a Christmas lunch, and members were able to share their stories with club visitors.



Left to right – Peter Petherick, John O'Shaugnessy, Neil Davies (Community Support Adviser), Robert Nankivell, Cassie O'Shaugnessy, Keith Wilkinson, Ken Vitnell, Jennifer Emmerton, Tony Emmerton

The CCVVA VHW 2016 event will be held on a different day to its normal meetings with the aim of encouraging new people to the garden. This fits in well with VHW 2016 theme, Social Connection. The provisional 2016 event name is 'Gourmet, Meet and Greet'!

Club members observed the benefits of the garden first-hand when they saw people who had previously been quite isolated getting involved in the garden and feeling like they are positively contributing. An example is a war widow who comes to the community garden to talk to the gardeners and is able to take home produce for her own use.

The garden committee are keen to stress that despite lots of positive outcomes, particularly in terms of social connectivity, there have been ups and downs along the way. Tough times have required strong communication and negotiation amongst the committee but always going back to the ethos that the garden is for everybody. With a focus on social connection, the committee and members feel confident that all will remain 'rosy in the garden!'.

*Neil Davies
Community Support Advisor, DVA*



Volunteering and social connection

VOLUNTEERING *and* CONTACT ACT | **Connections**
grow with others

Social connectedness is a core aspect of volunteering, with participation in voluntary roles often enabling people to expand their networks and meet new people.

Volunteering allows people to fulfil a meaningful and positive role in which they can develop new skills, gain a sense of achievement and increase career options.

Our society often underestimates the power of feeling connected with others, overlooking the severe effects social isolation has on many individuals in Australia.

Those suffering from mental health difficulties often experience social isolation and do not enjoy that sense of belonging we all yearn for so naturally.

In the famous *Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs*, belonging is ranked third amongst basic human needs such as food, water and breathing.

The overwhelming benefits of social connectedness through volunteering are remarkable. Studies show 'belongingness' is an important predictor of psychological health and greater levels of loneliness are linked to greater levels of psychological distress and lower levels of psychological wellbeing.

The Connections Program at Volunteering and Contact ACT is an example of a program that fosters social connectedness through volunteering.

The program matches mental health consumers with volunteer 'buddies' to assist them on their recovery journey. Participants benefit greatly from

the program, which reduces social isolation and reconnects them with the wider community.

'I always look forward to meeting up with my buddy. She provided me with a reason to leave the house when I was feeling particularly down. She understands when I just can't make it and is still there for me. We have been to night markets, the theatre, a concert and just for a walk and chat over hot chocolate which has helped me remember that life really is still worth living,' a program participant said.

In addition to the benefits experienced by the participants, volunteers also gain something from the program with research showing people who volunteer are happier and healthier than those who do not volunteer.

A Connections Program volunteer who has helped multiple participants for many years said, 'Volunteering for this program has been exceptionally rewarding on two fronts. Not only are you witnessing and contributing to someone turning their life around, you are also building a wonderful friendship with someone you can learn from just as much as they learn from you.'

Volunteering is a proven pathway to participation and social connectedness and provides a wealth of opportunities, including contributing to the social fabric of our society. If you are interested in experiencing the benefits of volunteering yourself go to www.govolunteer.com.au to search over 12,000 volunteering opportunities today.

Volunteering Australia

Volunteering: time willingly given for the common good without financial gain.

Managing social anxiety

For some of us it can be really difficult to connect with other people.

We can be really shy, feel anxious about what other people may think about us and lack the confidence to put ourselves in unfamiliar situations, often feeling unsafe around people we do not know.

Many people get nervous or self-conscious on occasion, such as when giving a speech or interviewing for a new job. But at the other end of the spectrum, social anxiety, or social phobia, is more than just shyness or occasional nerves.

People with social anxiety disorder get so anxious and distressed in social situations that they try to avoid those situations altogether. A person with social anxiety disorder might be scared of one specific situation (for example, speaking up in a meeting at work) or lots of different situations (giving a speech, being watched while writing, eating in front of people).

If you think that social anxiety might be affecting your life, you are not alone. Social anxiety is one of the most common types of anxiety, and about one in twelve people, or almost two million Australians will experience it at some point in their lives.

Research suggests that social anxiety might be even more common in veterans. About one in seven Vietnam veterans have been affected by it, however the rates of current social anxiety are lower in serving members than the community average.

Avoidance leads to more problems

While avoiding anxiety provoking situations may help you feel better in the short term, in the long term it can leave you unable to participate in any social situation. The more a feared social situation is avoided, the scarier it gets. Imagine missing out on a child's wedding or a family reunion. Avoidance keeps social anxiety going.

Where do I get help?

A GP is always a good place to start when trying to overcome social anxiety, as they can make referrals to specialists, and support your efforts with medications, if necessary.

Cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) has been shown to be the most effective treatment for social anxiety. CBT involves learning how to control the physical symptoms of anxiety through relaxation techniques and breathing exercises, challenging unhelpful thoughts- replacing them with more realistic opinions and facing feared situations rather than avoiding them.

Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service (VVCS) provides free and confidential, nation-wide counselling and support for war and service-related mental health conditions, such as posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety and depression.

VVCS also provides relationship and family counselling to address issues that can arise due to the unique nature of military service. VVCS counsellors have an understanding of military culture and can work with clients to find effective solutions for improved mental health and wellbeing.

The High Res website and app has tools that can help you manage your anxiety, such as controlled breathing and progressive muscle relaxation. The Thoughts tools can also help you to practice spotting any unhelpful thoughts and replacing them with more helpful ones. <https://at-ease.dva.gov.au/highres/#!/home>

Mental Health and Wellbeing booklet is available to order or download from the DVA AT Ease website

A useful Australian self-help book is *Overcoming shyness and social phobia* by Professor Ron Rapee, available at any on-line or good book store.

Amelia Blenkin, Acting DVA Mental Health Adviser



SEVEN STRATEGIES TO HELP EASE SOCIAL ANXIETY

The best treatment approach for social anxiety disorder varies from person to person. You may find that these self-help strategies are enough to ease your social anxiety symptoms:

1. coffee, tea, energy drinks and chocolate can increase anxiety symptoms. Avoid or limit your intake
2. often we think a drink will calm our nerves, but alcohol increases your risk of having an anxiety attack. Drink only in moderation
3. being well rested will help you stay calm in social situations, lack of sleep can make you more prone to feeling anxious
4. find a volunteer activity doing something you enjoy. Finding an activity to focus on while you are in the company of others can really help to boost your confidence. Ideas include walking dogs, volunteering at an animal shelter, driving the elderly to appointments or offering your services as a gardener
5. take a social skills class or an assertiveness training class. These classes are often offered at local adult education centres or community colleges
6. learn to relax- exercise, meditate or find a relaxation App that works for you
7. quit smoking. Contrary to popular belief, smoking leads to higher levels of anxiety.

If you've tried the techniques above and you're still struggling with anxiety, professional help could be useful.

VetRide:

Living life with some get up and go



Do you remember Norm? He turned up on our TV screens in the 1970s as the main character in the highly successful *Life Be In It* health campaign. We saw Norm encouraged to get off the couch and participate and by the 1980s 94 per cent of Australians recognized Norm and his *Life Be In It* message. The message 'Be in it today, live more of your life' remains relevant today. In fact, after a revival of Norm in the year 2000, *Life Be In It* and Norm are still recognised by 85 per cent of Aussies.

One group in the veteran community who embrace that message is VetRide who, in their words, are, 'dedicated through cycling to the welfare of all service and ex-service personnel of the Australian Defence Forces'.

This organisation encourages all service and ex-service personnel, regardless of age to get out and participate in a healthy activity: cycling. The residual benefit of this is that they give each other social and emotional support, while being active. VetRide conducts an annual ride event, the *Service and Sacrifice Tour*. This year it included riders travelling from Toowoomba in Queensland and Seymour in Victoria, to Canberra, where their epic journeys culminated in a commemorative ceremony in the Australian capital.

Let's ride a mile in the lycra of the Queensland contingent is an account of the ride by tour leader, Arthur Willemse:

The VetRide Queensland contingent consisting of nine Veterans and four Current Serving ADF Members and support drivers, Robert and John, set off from Toowoomba on the 5 March 2016, on a marathon cycle ride to Canberra to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the Battle of Long Tan.

The group ranged in age from 23 to 79. The younger serving soldiers proved to be the fittest and fastest, however the old and bold showed their guile and endurance. The 14-day VetRide Queensland was predominantly self-funded except for kind donations from RSL Queensland, Searles Garden Products, Monza Imports, Carmen's Kitchen, FE Sports, DVA VAN Community Support Queensland, some private donations, and a number of RAR and Battalion associations.

Each day's ride was approximately 100kms with the first five days very hot and we were told to keep the fluids up, so of course they complied at the end of each day. The crew endured two wet days, one was bearable,



L:R David Murray, Frank Parisio, Ted Chitham, Peter Campbell, Darryl Backwell, James Jenkins, Sharna Appleton, John McFayden, Adam Timins, Arthur Willemse

but the other was just horrible with lightning, thunder and a lot of rain. The farmers were happy, but not the cyclists!

On the way to Canberra, the VetRide Queensland group had two rest days. The first in Tamworth, where Gordon Sharp (KIA at Long Tan 18 August 1966) is buried, and the second in Coolah, the resting place of Paul Large, (KIA at Long Tan). Graveside services were conducted at each site, presenting family members who attended each service with a Royal Australian Regiment Association sash. Coolah also provided a unique memorial: the Vietnam Memorial Avenue of red flowering redgum trees honouring those who died at the Long Tan Battle.

Queensland VetRide continued on their way, and five days later joined with 65 VetRide Victoria riders in Yass. There were many reunions between old service mates and everyone enjoyed the mutual support and care generated amongst the group.

Along the last road from Yass into Canberra, local people were amazed at the dedication of these intrepid cyclists and offered them encouragement and motivation. Finally, VetRide rode down Anzac Avenue in Canberra, to the Vietnam Memorial. After a moving commemorative service, the group rode to Old Parliament House to enjoy a much needed lunch in the Members Old Dining Room. It was a great finish to a wonderful trip where old friends reconnected and new friendships were formed. Some were more saddle sore than others after 1300 kms on a bike, but getting to know the current serving soldiers from 8/9 RAR and hear about current service life was a highlight.

It was a great commemorative ride and achievement for all involved.

If life is a journey, then it is up to each of us to get in the driver's seat and get going, just like the VetRide crew.

Nikki Wood, DVA

Social Inclusion Week promotes being valued and included

Created by Dr Jonathon Welch AM and launched in 2009 as an annual initiative, *Social Inclusion Week* aims to help ensure all Australians feel included and valued, giving everyone the opportunity to participate fully in society and to be inclusive of all cultures, age groups, nationalities and those experiencing disadvantage.

Social Inclusion Week promotes and supports connecting local communities, workmates, family and friends in order to build and strengthen relationships and networks.

It addresses isolation and exclusion by supporting people who may be unable to help themselves. Jonathon Welch has a long-standing passion for social justice and an overarching commitment to the community.

Social Inclusion Week takes place in the last week of November and is supported by *Rotary* and the *School of Hard Knocks*.

The theme, *Collaborate, Connect and Celebrate!* is a strong call to action, encouraging people of all ages to join together and engage with the objectives of the week by hosting or attending a social inclusion focused event. Each year, every state and territory embraces the vision to help build supportive inclusive communities by hosting a huge range of activities and events.

Everything from a *Guinness Book of World Record* attempt, community festivals, many sporting activities – in particular for those with a disability or first time trying a new sport, such as sailing or surfing – to choirs, bands and dance schools that open their doors for people to join in.

Countless community and workplace morning teas take place as well as social clubs and neighbourhoods welcoming people into their communities with a BBQ. Sometimes it's the simplest of gestures that bring people closer together.

This year, *Social Inclusion Week* runs from Saturday, 19 November to Sunday, 27 November. Registration of events and further information can be found at www.socialinclusionweek.com.au



'We want to touch the lives of even more people, and return to the values of a community that truly cares for each other and takes responsibility for supporting those who need a helping hand. Just a simple smile can make a world of difference in someone's life.' Dr Jonathon Welch AM

VVCS Group Programs

The Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service (VVCS) is well known for the free and confidential, nationwide counselling services it offers to current and former members of the ADF and their families.

Less well known is that VVCS also conducts a range of group programs that provide a safe and supportive environment in which participants can obtain treatment and support for mental health and wellbeing concerns.

People who attend programs often report that being in a group has helped them connect with others with similar experiences and develop self-management skills to enhance wellbeing.

Core programs offered through VVCS include *Doing Anger Differently*, *Mastering Anxiety*, *Beating the Blues*, *Sleeping Better*, *Building Better Relationships*, *Stepping Out* (transition program), and *Operation Life* (suicide prevention workshops).

All VVCS group programs are conducted by facilitators experienced in working with veterans and their families and are free for eligible participants.

To check availability or for more details on programs available, visit www.vvcs.gov.au/Services/group-programs.htm or call 1800 011 046 during business hours.



A SOCIALLY INCLUSIVE VETERAN AND EX-SERVICE COMMUNITY



Values, like mateship and helping each other, are the real strength of many veteran groups.

There are some really vibrant veteran and ex-service community groups that actively try to connect with diverse groups in their local area.

These groups are a community of their own, yet they recognise that they exist within a wider community and their connections enable those who are involved to benefit emotionally, socially, physically and economically.

However, some people may feel they are unable to connect to others who have not had similar military or life experiences to their own. For example, current serving members leaving the ADF can feel disconnected from their social network and may feel loneliness, social isolation and a loss of the sense of belonging.

To truly experience the benefits of being part of a social group, people need to be provided with the opportunity to engage. This is more than holding a nominal membership. It is the quality of engagement in a group that influences the degree to which people can experience emotional benefits as well as social benefits, such as goodwill, trust and reciprocity (aka social capital).

Getting creative about lowering the barriers to social connection for those who are missing out could bring in new members and enrich the experience of the group.

One very successful idea has been an ex-service organisation opening their gym sessions to members of the community so they can all train together, another has been to invite a community choral society to join with them in order to enlarge their repertoire and give performances.

And please don't forget to share your ideas and successes with us.

Dimitri Batras, DVA National Health Promotion Adviser and Amelia Blenkin, Acting DVA Mental Health Adviser

Here are some questions that could get a discussion going:

- if I were going through a rough patch or felt like a bit of an outsider what would help me feel welcome and included
- how can we make it easier to join in
- to what extent are the ways that we do things preventing others from getting involved
- are we truly welcoming and inclusive of all?

Need some more ideas?

- local councils will often have lists of community groups and events
- most large cities have a Citizens Advice Bureau
- Veterans Access Network can help with programs and grant advice
Telephone: 133 254
Regional callers: 1800 555 254
- ourcommunity.com.au/article/view_article.jsp?articleId=3487
- www.qld.gov.au/community/your-home-community/groups/
- communitiesonline.org.au/

Benefits of joining a social group

Cassy Marshall, DVA Community Support Adviser

Regularly connecting with people is an important part of a fulfilling and healthy lifestyle.

It is widely accepted that positive social connection is essential for physical and psychological health, wellbeing and survival.

Relative to socially isolated individuals, socially connected people live longer and are less likely to suffer from depression, anxiety and have a higher resilience in response to stressful life events and environments.

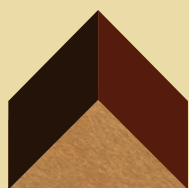
Interestingly, not just any relationship will do. Research indicates the type of relationship appears to impact health, with negative relationships resulting in poorer health outcomes.

People with positive relationships also show an increased resistance to dementia along with a variety of diseases ranging from heart disease to cancer.

People experience social isolation for a variety of reasons, such as discrimination, lack of employment, living alone or being homeless, losing loved ones, and inability to participate in activities due to access or mobility issues, illness, finances or transport.

Groups that are most commonly identified as being vulnerable to, or most at risk of, social isolation are seniors, youth, people with a disability, culturally and linguistically diverse people and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people.

Former Australian Defence Force members may be at risk as their previous social networks are lost and they may lack connections in their local communities.



**Australian
Men's Shed
Association**

SHOULDER TO SHOULDER

Men's Sheds are a peculiarly Australian phenomenon. In the past decade a wide-range of community-based Men's Sheds have sprung up, each with its own unique identity and purpose. A shed is a place for creating and productivity. By setting up places for older men to work on projects together, they learn or share skills, make friends, network

and avail themselves of health support information and opportunities, all benefits commonly gained within the Men's Shed.

Visit the Australian Men's Shed Association website www.mensshed.org or call 1300 550 009 to locate a Men's Shed in your area.

So the all-important question – how can we become socially connected?

There are a number of ways to reduce or avoid feeling socially isolated. A good place to start is focusing on yourself and your health. Engaging in a healthy balanced diet and participating in regular exercise can lead to feelings of positive self-worth.

One of the easiest ways to make new friends and expand your social circle is to meet your friend's friends. Why not invite them on your next outing (or vice versa)?

Other ways to improve connection is to learn something new, find a hobby or combine these through joining a group or volunteering (read *Volunteering and social connection* on page 11) as a way to participate in social activities, meet new people and contribute to your community.

Joining a group can provide an opportunity to:

- develop new social contacts in the local community
- foster a sense of belonging through being connected to a group, and to the wider community
- provide a supportive environment to socialise and learn something new.

The great news is there is an abundance of options available within the community when looking for a group to be part of. The most difficult task is to narrow down these options and make a choice!

Start locally, head to your local community centre or library to see what is available. Or jump online and visit the websites below to investigate opportunities in the wider community, there is something for everyone.

For more information visit:

Community programs or groups

www.meetup.com/en-AU/cities/au/

ourcommunity.com.au/article/view_article.jsp?articleId=3487

Volunteering

www.volunteeringaustralia.org/



KEEPING YOUR MIND ACTIVE:

Word Search

CHALLENGING YOUR BRAIN WITH PUZZLES AND GAMES CAN KEEP YOUR BRAIN ACTIVE AND IMPROVE ITS PHYSIOLOGICAL FUNCTIONING.

F	S	S	R	E	Y	S	R	H	E	A	L	T	H	U	C	M	N	O	L
F	U	P	V	L	D	J	O	T	A	D	A	C	V	D	Y	F	D	R	G
R	Y	I	T	O	S	T	I	C	B	E	L	O	N	G	I	N	G	R	B
V	O	H	R	N	Y	E	Y	T	I	A	K	S	C	P	N	T	F	I	Q
F	K	S	O	G	G	E	C	R	M	A	B	T	U	A	A	C	E	R	G
H	F	N	P	E	C	N	A	N	S	V	L	N	C	I	P	O	S	N	R
G	P	O	P	V	H	C	I	H	E	G	R	E	G	M	Z	N	I	T	I
N	N	I	U	I	E	L	A	E	N	I	L	V	T	D	F	V	N	N	V
I	O	T	S	T	A	R	H	N	B	I	R	E	H	R	O	E	U	E	O
D	I	A	R	Y	I	F	Y	M	K	L	A	E	I	E	M	R	G	B	C
R	T	L	A	N	Y	A	F	Y	W	E	L	E	P	E	F	S	E	F	O
A	A	E	G	A	T	C	O	E	W	A	N	E	V	X	R	A	P	O	N
W	C	R	J	C	I	C	E	W	C	D	Y	L	W	I	E	T	V	R	N
E	I	K	B	T	N	E	U	E	S	T	O	S	F	R	Y	I	I	M	E
R	N	R	E	I	U	P	K	S	E	V	I	C	P	S	U	O	B	A	C
F	U	O	V	V	M	T	O	S	N	I	X	O	R	O	L	N	P	T	T
Q	M	W	E	I	M	A	U	I	U	S	C	K	N	G	A	S	O	I	I
T	M	T	M	T	O	N	J	H	M	C	T	K	I	O	O	F	F	O	O
R	O	E	A	Y	C	C	E	H	Z	F	Q	H	U	U	I	K	R	N	N
X	C	N	F	E	G	E	J	C	Y	I	I	Z	E	O	O	L	X	A	R

EXTRA CHALLENGING WORD SEARCH

Words can run forwards, backwards, up and down and diagonally in the grid. Letters may be used more than once.

COMMUNITY

BELONGING

CONVERSATIONS

EVENTS

WELLBEING

REWARDING

RELATIONSHIPS

SOCIAL

LONGEVITY

COMMUNICATION

NETWORK

FRIENDS

FORMATION

ACCEPTANCE

SUPPORT

HEALTH

CONNECTION

INVOLVEMENT

AFFECTION

SHARING

EXPERIENCES

ACTIVITY

Five, 10 and 15 year recognition for Men's Health Peer Education volunteers

A number of MHPE volunteers have achieved five, 10 and 15 years of active service. A BIG THANK YOU to all those listed here for your contribution to the health and wellbeing of the veteran and ex-service community.

15 years

ACT & NSW	QLD	WA
Gerry Bailey	Neville Abbey	Bill Adams
Malcolm Bush	Graham Field	Jan Benson
Robert Crust	Peter Harvey	John Benson
Don Donnelly	Ken Higgins	Damian Dixon OAM
Lindsay Muddle	Maureen Javes	Gail Keddie
David Williams	Peter Lawrence	Jim Keddie
	Kevin Moss	
	Sean O'Mara OAM	VIC
	Barry Somers	Gary Treeve
	Peter Wood	
	Phillip Young	

10 years

ACT & NSW	QLD	WA
Roderick Bain OAM	Alison Bowman	Richard Bligh
Bob Bethel	Syd Cooper	Sandra Cross
Roger Horton	Bruce Reedman	
Peter Kennedy		SA
Ray Kuschert		Keith Bleechmore
Veronica Kuschert		Ron Boyce

5 years

ACT & NSW	QLD	VIC
Noel Cartwright	Bob Dennis	Lindsay Oates
Warren Churchland	Garry Hunt	
Leslie Deane	Alfred Mason	NT
Graham Drews	Ray Mastorgio	Ron Blanchard
Allan Edgar	Neil O'Halloran	
Neil McLaughlin	John Pedersen	
Robert Postlethwaite	Peter Robinson	
Graham Rice	John Vickary	
Raymond Tulloh	Ann Warren	
Gail Walton	Geoff Whittet	

Have we forgotten anyone? If you've been with MHPE for five, 10 or 15 years, and haven't received your MHPE volunteer certificate and badge, please contact your MHPE state coordinator.



Gary Treeve being presented with his 15 year recognition award by VAN Victoria Assistant Director, Mark Dalton



Ron Boyce being presented with his 10 year recognition award by Acting Deputy Commissioner, Jan Hyde



Lindsay Oates being presented with his 5 year recognition award by VAN Victoria Assistant Director, Mark Dalton

MHPE volunteers come from all areas of Australia and receive training from DVA to discuss men's health and lifestyle issues with their peers, to raise the awareness of men's health in Australia among veterans and the ex-service community in particular.

If you are interested in becoming a MHPE volunteer, contact your MHPE state coordinator as listed on the back of this magazine or phone 133 254 (metro) or 1800 555 254 (regional).

GET CONNECTED during Veterans' Health Week 2016



Social Connection, the relationship people have with others, is the theme of Veterans' Health Week 2016, which will run from Saturday, 22 October to Sunday, 30 October.

Social connection includes relationships with family, friends, colleagues and neighbours, as well as connections people make through paid or unpaid work, volunteering, sport and other leisure activities.

These relationships are beneficial to both your health and wellbeing. At a population level, an absence of social relationships has been linked to a higher mortality risk. Community groups can enable individuals to form and maintain positive social connections, because they bring people together for a meaningful purpose.

You can help others join or maintain their connections; for instance, is there an old friend you've been thinking about re-connecting with? Don't wait until the week comes around in October, pick up the phone now.

In the lead-up to the week, the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) is seeking to partner with ex-service organisations and community groups to organise and participate in fun, health awareness raising activities.

As we get closer to the week, the events that will be run will be detailed on the DVA website.



SOCIAL CONNECTION

participate connect influence

If you aren't involved in planning or assisting at an activity, have a look at the events listing and see whether there is an activity or activities in your local community that you, your family and friends, could attend or become involved in.

FOR ASSISTANCE OR TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THE WEEK:

contact DVA on 133 254 or
1800 555 254 for regional callers,

email vhw@dva.gov.au;

or visit www.dva.gov.au/veterans-health-week
for the latest information and event listings.

**We look forward to your
involvement in the week!**

SPIDERS' WEBS AND BOOKWORMS

Jo Wagner, DVA Librarian

BOOKS

Middle Aged Men in Lycra

by Ross Davies

Boolarong Press, 2014

Griff's life is in crisis after the death of his wife and the subsequent loss of his job. Alienated from everything that once defined his world, he meets up with a disparate group of cycling mates every morning at a cafe in the Southbank Parklands. This book reveals an up-close and intimate view of Brisbane's cafe culture and a cycling fraternity dominated by middle-aged men in lycra.

ABC Shop \$24.95

Social: Why our brains are wired to connect

by Matthew D. Lieberman

Oxford University Press, 2013

Being social is as fundamental to our survival as our ability to navigate the world through vision and reason. In this book, Matthew Lieberman draws on the latest research in the newly emerging field of social cognitive neuroscience to show that social interaction has moulded the evolution of our brains: we are wired to be social.

Book Depository: \$18.58

The art of mingling: fun and proven techniques for mastering any room

by Jeanne Martinet

St. Martin's Griffin, 2015

The art of mingling will show you how to overcome your fears, meet new people with charm and confidence, and achieve social success at every kind of party -- business or pleasure. Filled with dozens of simple techniques, tricks, lines and manoeuvres.

Book Depository: \$30.50

Count me in: how I stepped off the sidelines, created connection, and built a fuller, richer, more lived-in life

by Emily White

McClelland & Stewart, 2015

Count me in is for everyone who feels their lives could use a little more real-life connection, at home, in their neighbourhoods, and in the wider world.

A thoughtful, lively, and practical roadmap for anyone who wants to feel more connected, and who wants their life to feel bigger, more grounded, and true.

Amazon: \$32.50 Ebook: \$13.50

ONLINE RESOURCES

***Men's Social Connectedness* by beyondblue**

Recognising that men often find it difficult to maintain social connections through their middle years, beyondblue, commissioned research to understand how men perceive and experience social connectedness, to identify trigger points and pathways that lead them to lose social connections and to highlight tools that help them develop stronger ties.

www.beyondblue.org.au

MHPE Magazine



Opportunities for social connection by VicHealth

Social connections comprise the people we know, the friends we confide in, the family we belong to and the community we live in. Each contributes to our physical and mental health in a variety of ways. This summary of learnings and implications is based on recent published research examining participation and social connection. It focuses on the importance of social inclusion, social support through supportive relationships, social participation, social networks, social/community cohesion and civic engagement.

www.vichealth.vic.gov.au

Social isolation and loneliness among older Australians by Aged & Community Services Australia

This paper focuses on older Australians living at home in the community. It considers the prevalence, causes and consequences of social isolation and loneliness and examines strategies for promoting social connection and inclusion.

www.agedcare.org.au/publications

Social isolation, loneliness, and all-cause mortality in older men and women by Andrew Steptoe

This research study suggests that being socially isolated may have a greater effect on risk of early death, especially among the elderly.

www.pnas.org

Notification to our readers

The MHPE magazine was first published in June 2002. Our first edition, Volume 1, Issue 1, was actually called a newsletter and written primarily for MHPE volunteers. The newsletter featured regular articles from DVA's medical advisers, and the mental health and health promotion sections of the Department. It also profiled 'Peer Education Facilitators' now known as MHPE volunteers. The newsletter's purpose was to inform volunteers regarding MHPE program requirements, include health promotion articles and be a forum for sharing ideas and information. The newsletter eventually evolved into a magazine and a publication that was distributed and promoted to the broader community.

In 2010 we conducted a review of the magazine, and many of our long-term readers would remember that the review recommended we reduce the magazine frequency from four to three editions per year. The review also recommended an increase in health content and overall quality of the magazine. We included a tear-out and increased the size of the magazine so we could include more health promotion articles that would appeal to a wider audience. Many of the articles had a gender neutral focus and so were relevant for men and women. These changes were highlighted in the July 2012 edition when we published the first Veterans' Health Week issue.

In 2016, we see another change with the magazine to be produced twice a year with the next issue being published in 2017. The magazine content, style and focus will remain the same, and our intention is to increase the size of each edition. Each issue will have a primary and secondary theme so we can include a greater range of health information. The magazine will be rebadged as Issue 1 and Issue 2 with publication expected in April and September. Issue 2 will continue to be aligned with Veterans' Health Week as the primary theme. The magazine will continue to be provided to all readers in hardcopy and also available online.

The aim is to continue to make the MHPE magazine an informative, interesting and helpful publication on men's health. As such, your feedback and ideas are very welcome, and if you would like to discuss anything in relation to the magazine (including the submission of articles, which are always very welcome) please contact me.

Naomi Mulcahy
MHPE National Coordinator & MHPE Magazine Editor

menshealth@dva.gov.au

Ph: (02) 9213 7794 or call 133 254 (metro) or 1800 555 254 (country) and ask for extension 417794.

MHPE National Round-up

MHPE Queensland

It's been that time of year again, when our rural and regional volunteers have been spreading positive men's health messages at local show displays, local markets, and shopping centre display opportunities.

One of our new volunteers incorporated MHPE displays into their two ANZAC Day display tables at the Beerwah Market Place shopping centre. At least 80 – 100 men engaged with him and took away useful information about men's health topics.

The Darling Downs volunteers' display at the Crows Nest Show on 7 May was a great success. MHPE volunteers spoke to many locals about the MHPE program and topics relevant to the rural community. Several specific cases of assistance were provided to local veterans.

Our South Queensland volunteer representative was busy working with his peers around the Ipswich region delivering prostate health talks, which were very popular, as well as promoting the MHPE program to a broad audience at the local Legacy Sausage Sizzle. Several volunteers were involved in events for International Men's Health Week, including working with Mates4Mates who conducted a cooking session and nutrition talk in Townsville.

Queensland volunteers are working hard to fly the MHPE flag and are making a positive impact in regional areas where resources are not as readily available to their local communities. Recent activities demonstrated volunteers were innovative in finding many ways to insert the MHPE message into almost any conversation and with great results.



Mates4Mates cooking demonstration – L:R Denis Devantier, Tony Caruana and Paul Warren.

If you're interested in being a MHPE volunteer, turn to pages 27–28 for information on the MHPE program and to read more about what volunteers do.

MHPE South Australia

Prospect Fair, St Helens Park

A big thank you goes out to Ian Short, Ray Benzie, Bob Kelly and Richard Kirkman who along with Neil and Margie attended the Prospect Fair. It was largely attended by community groups/members, however it was pleasing to see the MHPE volunteers make good links with the Rotary Club who had a number of veterans in their ranks. Light hearted discussion was had around healthy living experiences (good and bad!) with the Rotary members whilst MHPE products and information were provided.

Other outcomes of the day included links made with Prospect RSL, the general community were informed about the MHPE program, and veterans were signposted to appropriate channels regarding DVA white card and other enquiries, and an informal impromptu meeting was led by Richard Kirkman to review follow-up actions from Recall training.

The MHPE volunteers expressed their enjoyment at working together at the stall and are now planning future opportunities. Special thanks goes to Ian Short who brought the event to the attention of VAN Community Support staff. Ian also ensured there was a strong volunteer presence on the day whilst putting in a full shift helping with set-up and pack-up... well done Ian!

National 10,000 Steps Challenge

The majority of SA's MHPE volunteers will be participating in the National 10,000 Steps Challenge. A few walks have been mapped out around Adelaide and in country areas, and will be promoted during the Challenge to veterans, MHPE volunteers and DVA staff.



Ian Short, Ray Benzie, Bob Kelly and Richard Kirkman along with Neil Davies at the Prospect Fair.

MHPE Victoria

Chequered Flag Day

On Sunday, 15 May, four MHPE volunteers, Alan White, Doc Anthony, Rob Bailey and Russ Wilson, braved the surprisingly cold and windy weather and ran an MHPE stall at the Australian Street Rod Federation Chequered Flag day (formerly known as Blokes Day Out), located at Sandown Racecourse.

It was a great opportunity to promote men's health and the MHPE program. The MHPE stall was located next to the support group from Heels for Combat Boots who raise money for Soldier On.

The Men's Shed Association ran 'Spanner in the Works' men's health checks. The volunteers had the opportunity to liaise with Foundation 49, the Army cadets and the Navy, who were also part of the event.

Alan White - Victorian volunteer representative

Alan attended the Latrobe's Biggest Bloke's Breakfast on 20 May, 2016 to promote men's health. There were 600 men in attendance ranging in age from their 20s through to late 70s.

Alan represented DVA's MHPE program and spoke about his experience with health issues as well as promoting the importance of being proactive about your health.

Alan was an eager MHPE advocate handing out the MHPE paper show bags containing MHPE magazines and health promotion material.

Men's Health Week

Many of the Victorian MHPE volunteers ran an event for Men's Health Week. The events included; a guest speaker at a community function, a men's breakfast, a stall at Bunnings and a day trip to the National Vietnam Veterans Museum.



Chequered Flag Day – Luke Newhouse VIC Community Support Adviser, Alan White and Doc Anthony accompanied by the support group from Heels for Combat Boots.

Connecting through technology

Some social media tools to help stay connected

Being and staying connected has never been easier thanks to the multitude of social media programs and apps that are now available. With so many available, what should you choose?

Well, the obvious choice for many and used by almost 13 million Australians is **Facebook** (free, Apple and Android). When you think that nearly 1.5 billion people worldwide have a Facebook account, that 'six degrees of separation' theory is now much more a reality. I'm not really a fan of Mr Zuckerberg's creation (the targeted ads annoy me, but no more so than the endless pics of people's meals!), but used wisely, and with the appropriate security settings, Facebook remains a favourite for many.

For me, **Instagram** (free, Apple and Android) is a better option. Over a quarter of all Australians are now on Instagram and its popularity has exploded in the past couple of years, especially for those wanting to share content with fewer people. Instagram can be used to share Instagram photos and videos across other social networks, as well as send messages and posts to friends. Sound familiar? Give it a try and decide for yourself which best suits your needs.

Another popular application to help stay connected is **Skype** (free, Apple and Android). Skype allows free messaging, and free voice and video messaging (if Skype to Skype) to any of your contacts, no matter where they are located. Both video and voice calls can include 25 people, which rules me out since I don't have 25 friends that I want to call all at once. The advantage of Skype is that it can be used on all devices, even on many smart televisions.

Two other applications also available are **Vine** and **Snapchat** (free, Apple and Android). Both are becoming increasingly popular, with most users sending videos and posts to a small number of their friends, unlike Facebook where updates are generally broadcasted to your extended friend group.

Many would not know of **FireChat** (free, Apple and Android), but it has the advantage of free instant messaging without an internet connection or mobile phone coverage. The user creates their own network of friends and, using a 'mesh network' using Bluetooth and Wi-Fi, can transmit messages and pictures offline to other devices located within 150 meters or so of one another. The more in the user's network, the bigger and faster their network becomes!

This is just a sample of the many social media tools available, but the clear message in this digital age is that there is no excuse not to be connected ... so go forth and connect!

John Hall, DVA

While the above resources provide a strong platform to help strengthen mental health and wellbeing, sometimes it might not be enough, or may not be what is needed.

For Australia's serving men and women, the very unique experiences of combat and other traumas that may be experienced during deployments can, for some members, contribute to longer-term mental health consequences. The demands of military service, adjustment to life at home following deployment, and/or separation from the military, can all be highly stressful events and contributing factors to the deterioration of a veteran's mental health.

Like any health condition, the sooner help is sought the more quickly recovery can occur. If you need additional support consider discussing your situation with a counsellor.

Counsellors at the Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service (VVCS) have an understanding of military culture, and can work with clients to find effective solutions for improved mental health and wellbeing. VVCS counsellors are available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year by calling 1800 011 046.







MHPE volunteers – What do they do?

MHPE volunteers share health information. For example: one-on-one chats; health week events; working with Men’s Sheds; distributing health information; running a stand at a community expo, or giving a talk at a local community group or ex-service organisation meeting.

To talk to a volunteer, please contact the relevant MHPE State/Territory Volunteer Representative below:

NAME	STATE/TERRITORY	PHONE NUMBER	EMAIL ADDRESS
Sean O’Mara OAM	North Queensland	(07) 4952 4960 or 0427 524 960	sean.betty@bigpond.com
Ian Dainer	South Queensland	(07) 5467 3393 or 0438 729 040	kangoona@bigpond.com
Alan White	Metro Victoria	(03) 9598 1007 or 0407 617 800	askypilot@bigpond.com
Gary Treeve	Regional Victoria	(02) 6059 2765 or 0407 480 201	mtreeve1@bigpond.com
Ron Blanchard	Northern Territory	(08) 8927 5638 or 0476 145 303	aileron@bigpond.com
Kathleen Behrendt	South Australia	(08) 8837 7287 or 0428 377 287	kbehrendt63@gmail.com
Laurie Harrison	Tasmania	(03) 6263 7038 or 0428 626 370	trout.2@bigpond.com
John Macartney	New South Wales & ACT	(02) 6657 4165 or 0427 787 296	jrmaca@bigpond.com
Malcolm ‘Tiny’ Small	Western Australia	(08) 9337 6773 or 0408 935 687	tinys@westnet.com.au

KEEPING YOUR MIND ACTIVE ANSWERS

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QUICK GUIDE

“I want to volunteer – how do I go about it?”

Thought about volunteering but not sure where to go to find a volunteer role? Here are some options to help you find the best volunteer role to suit you.

This is not an exhaustive list of suggestions but they are a good start when you may not be quite sure where to go.

1. Log on to GoVolunteer www.govolunteer.com.au

With this online tool you can search for volunteer positions nationally. You can search by organisation type, position or post code.

2. Contact your local volunteering centre

These services offer you the opportunity to make an appointment and talk to somebody about volunteering and the opportunities available to meet your requirements. Contact details are available on the Volunteering Australia website www.volunteeringaustralia.org

3. Contact your local council

Many municipal and shire councils –

- Produce community directories that include not-for-profit organisations needing volunteers, or
- Include lists of volunteering opportunities on their website, or
- You could get in touch with the community services department in the council, as these people may have knowledge of local opportunities.

4. Look at your local newspaper

Often there are articles about volunteering and community service advertisements that inform people about local volunteering roles.

5. Contact your local neighbourhood house or community centre

Ask for information about their volunteering opportunities or information about other volunteer involving organisations in the area.

Volunteering Australia

www.volunteeringaustralia.org

marketing@volunteeringaustralia.org

6. Interested in a specific cause?

You might like to search on the internet for organisations that address or respond to issues related to that cause. You might also like to ask at your local library for information on groups that try to effect change in society such as advocacy, human rights or the environment.

7. Interested in volunteering in a specific sector?

If you have decided on the sector where you might like to volunteer, you could consider the following options:

- **Health:** You might like to phone a local hospital or community health service and ask about their volunteering opportunities.
- **Education:** Enquire at schools and other education institutions.
- **Environment:** Enquire at your local council and other environmental organisations both locally and nationally.
- **Sport and recreation:** Contact your local council for information on sporting clubs and groups, or visit the websites of state bodies for particular sports.
- **Arts/culture:** Enquire at local museums, libraries and not-for-profit galleries and heritage centres.
- **Emergency:** Using either the phone book or website look for volunteer based fire, emergency, surf life saving, first aid, ambulance or coast guard/patrol groups.
- **Business/professional/union:** Contact your local chamber of commerce or a professional body or union you belong to or are interested in supporting.
- **Law/justice/political:** Enquire at the head office in your state for the contact details of local branches or political parties. Another option would be to contact the Department of Justice in your state for information about volunteer programs that support people dealing with the justice system.

**Good luck with your search for the right
volunteering role for you!**

The Men’s Health Peer Education (MHPE) program aims to raise the veteran community’s awareness of men’s health issues and encourages men to manage their own health and wellbeing. The program trains volunteers from all age groups to provide health information to members of the veteran and ex-service community.

MHPE volunteers share this information via many channels, for example, giving a talk on a health issue at a local community group, holding a stand at a community expo or

speaking person-to-person with a veteran, such as a friend at a barbeque. The MHPE program is open to any member, male or female, of the veteran, ex-service, or general community, who is able to volunteer their time and has a genuine interest in helping veterans to learn about healthy lifestyle choices.

For information about the MHPE program, visit our website www.dva.gov.au/mhpe.htm or contact the relevant DVA MHPE Coordinator below:

NAME		PHONE NUMBER	EMAIL ADDRESS
DVA QLD MHPE Coordinator	Queensland	(07) 3223 8715	MHPEQLD@dva.gov.au
DVA WA MHPE Coordinator	Western Australia	(08) 9366 8359	MHPEWA@dva.gov.au
DVA VIC MHPE Coordinator	Victoria	(03) 9284 6682	MHPEVIC@dva.gov.au
DVA NT MHPE Coordinator	Northern Territory	(08) 8935 1400	MHPENT@dva.gov.au
DVA SA MHPE Coordinator	South Australia	(08) 8290 0375	MHPESA@dva.gov.au
DVA TAS MHPE Coordinator	Tasmania	(03) 6221 6711	MHPETAS@dva.gov.au
DVA NSW & ACT MHPE Coordinator	NSW & ACT	(02) 9213 7661	MHPENSW@dva.gov.au



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 Men’s Health Peer Education

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 Editor
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 c/- Department of Veterans’ Affairs
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If you’d like to share your story with our readers or have an idea for an article, we’d like to hear from you. You can email the Editor at menshealth@dva.gov.au or call 1800 555 254 (regional) or 133 254 (metro) and ask for the MHPE National Coordinator.