

Webinar Questions – Webinars 5 & 9 October 2023.

Accessibility of the Strategy

Questions

- Making the strategy public and open for co-design from the community
- It would be great if this type of meeting could be held more regularly - having a voice and hearing your voices and work that is being addressed is important
- I'm looking forward to hearing more from DVA regarding the strategy. Our work in the Veteran Space with combat Veterans and their wellbeing. We look forward to discussing further plans regarding bringing our tribe together
- How will you promote the strategy to ensure and encourage our Veteran Community to learn more about it and how it will hopefully help them and their families - covering all current serving and former serving ADF members and their families across Australia?

Response

We thank you for your continued engagement. We will continue to update our webpage as we progress with development of the Strategy and action plans. We will keep you updated via our DVA website and our social media platforms. If you have any questions or further input, please email our team at mentalhealthstrategy@dva.gov.au.

Access and availability of services

Questions

- Looking at more support for rural areas in South Australia
- There are so many places that miss out on those services due to wait times or location of services
- One of the major barriers for people in rural areas is access, and having the professionals to service the areas, in order to assist all members, veterans and families there has to be people to man those places.
- More support for those that are living in the rural area
- Location and accessibility to services.

Response

- While people are serving, they have access to free and comprehensive mental health treatment.
 - Free, lifetime mental health care is available to anyone with a single day of full-time service in the Australian Defence Force (and some reservists) for any mental health condition, regardless of whether it relates to their service. This support is needs-based and uncapped.
 - Under NLHC (mental health), veterans can use their DVA White Card to access fully funded treatment of any mental health condition within Australia. A claim for compensation is not required to access this treatment.
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- Veterans receive services through the general health service system and DVA funds a range of services, including: Psychiatrists; General Practitioners (GPs); Allied mental health services; Pharmaceuticals; exercise physiology; physiotherapy; nutrition advice and inpatient and outpatient hospital treatment. Specific services available to veterans include [Open Arms - Veterans & Families Counselling](#), PTSD treatment programs and community-based drug and alcohol treatment programs.
- For more information or support call Open Arms on 1800 011 046 or visit www.openarms.gov.au.
- The growing provider numbers suggest DVA clients have good access to health providers. However, there may be areas of poor access, especially in rural areas. This reflects the low number of providers in rural areas, which is a problem endemic to the general health system unrelated to DVA provider fees.
- From 1 November 2022, Veteran Card holders can access fully funded allied mental health services by telehealth, without an initial consultation being held in person. As a result of this change, initial consultations can now occur through videoconferencing technologies.
- This change means that DVA clients can receive ongoing mental health treatment remotely where required and will help strengthen access to services for veterans across Australia, including those living in regional and remote areas.
- More information on Telehealth can be found here, [Permanent Telehealth information for clients | Department of Veterans' Affairs \(dva.gov.au\)](#)
- DVA, through the [Open Arms – Living Well website](#), has brought together a range of resources and apps designed to support veterans' and their families' wellbeing,, all which can be downloaded free from the App Store and Google Play. The resources include:
 - HighRes – can help to build resilience and mental fitness.
 - PTSD Coach – designed to assist trauma-impacted individuals to manage their emotions.
 - The Right Mix – designed to help manage alcohol consumption.
 - OP Life – designed for use with a mental health clinician to help people who are experiencing suicidal thoughts.
 - Head to Health – is a Department of Health and Aged Care portal that lists a range of mental health resources including help lines, websites and links to apps.
 - [Go Beyond](#) is a free, self-paced and practical online training program designed to help guide veterans in their adjustment to civilian life. It focuses on these key topics; Purpose and connection; seeking help; beliefs about civilians; regimentation; resentment and regret.
- The Wellbeing and Support Program (WASP) is a voluntary program that provides support to highly vulnerable veterans to improve their wellbeing. WASP provides intensive, supportive, face-to-face case management services for veterans who have significant vulnerabilities, the program is available to veterans across Australia who provide their consent to participate in the program.

Veterans' and Families' Hubs

- As part of the October 2022-23 Budget, the Government committed \$46.7 million to expand the Veterans' and Families' Hubs network. This commitment will see eight new hubs established in Southwest Perth, Northern Adelaide, Ipswich, Queanbeyan, the Hawkesbury region, the Hunter region, the Tweed/North Coast region and the Surf Coast/Geelong region. Preferred organisations have been identified to develop business cases for the
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eight new locations, with business case assessment to occur over the coming months. The 2022-23 Budget commitment also continues the work to establish hubs in Caboolture (Southeast Queensland) and Tasmania.

- The new hubs will complement the six established hubs, which are delivering support to veterans and families in Perth, Townsville, Adelaide, Darwin, Wodonga and Nowra.
- Veterans' and Families' Hubs provide veterans and families access to coordinated services, which may include mental and physical health services, wellbeing support, advocacy, employment and housing advice, and social connection. They are open to all current and former serving Australian Defence Force (ADF) members, including reservists and families, and have a key role in helping ADF members and families as they transition from military to civilian life.

Funding

Questions

- Will there be additional funding for the actions or is this strategy guiding the use of existing funding? And from which FY/budget?
- A barrier is funding!! Didn't DMFS recently have their budget reduced? How will this strategy be funded?

Response

It is anticipated that the Strategy will be supported by Action Plans which will outline how we the Strategy's goals and objectives. Any new initiatives would typically require consideration by the Australian Government in the Budget context.

Fees for practitioners

Questions

- A major barrier to accessing mental health services is the DVA fee schedule being well below that of workcover, private insurers, and a particular issue at the moment is the NDIS - all pay psychologists, psychiatrists, and counsellors far more than DVA.
- Increase pay rate for DVA psychologist sessions. This will increase the number of private psychologists that accept DVA cards and as a result it may reduce wait times.
- I understand the payments under the gold card and white card are lower than a normal fee and that means there is no incentive to accept .Payment is slow.

Response

- DVA is aware that some health care providers either do not have capacity to take on more patients, or have indicated they are unwilling to accept DVA payment rates. While this is regrettable, it is a business decision for the individual providers concerned.
 - In circumstances where DVA fees do not meet the clinical needs of a veteran, providers can make a request for a higher fee to be paid through DVA's prior approval arrangements. Providers seeking prior approval are required to provide clinical justification.
 - Any increase to DVA scheduled fees for mental health services would require a decision of Government through a Budget process, in the context of the Government's broader fiscal priorities.
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Monitoring and evaluation

Questions

- How will this strategy make a difference? How will you know it's making a difference?
- How will we know of progress? Will there be public reporting?
- Who will be developing the measurement? At the moment it is a financial acquittal and bums on seats. Plus any measures that are currently used are measures of "less unwell" rather than measure of "well and thriving"

Response

We recognise that our supports and services tend to focus on illness rather than promoting wellness.

The new joint Strategy will need to support individuals who are mentally healthy, through to being acutely unwell, and others whose needs fall somewhere in between.

It will also target mental health priorities such as prevention, early intervention, supports, and access to care.

The strategy itself will be supported by action plans that will set out how we are going to achieve these goals. There will be clear governance around the Strategy and we are working on a continuous improvement framework to guide the action plans.

Families

Questions

- A Strategy that reflects the diversity of veterans and families
- Families are the key to any MH&W conversation
- Will this strategy also look at improving mental health of spouses and family members
- Make sure families are actually receiving services

Response

- This Strategy is the first time Defence and DVA are working together to consider the mental health and wellbeing needs at all life stages. Working together on the Strategy will enable a coordinated approach to promote and maintain positive conditions for Defence people, veterans and families during Service and into civilian life to maximise wellbeing and employability.
 - The strategy targets mental health priorities such as prevention, early intervention, supports, and access to care. It includes quality improvements and innovation and it will be supported by a series of action plans.
 - DVA and Defence are also continuing to work on the development of a Defence and Veteran Family Wellbeing Strategy. We are engaging the Department of Defence, as well as key stakeholders like the Veteran Family Advocate, in the process of finalising the draft Strategy to ensure we reflect the outcomes of our engagements so far, capture the key services available to support families of veterans and inject the right level of ambition into Strategy to help guide future work in this area. Further consultation on the draft Strategy will be happening soon, including public roundtable on the consultation draft.
 - The Strategy will compliment both the family Strategy and the recently launched Transition Strategy [Veteran Transition Strategy | About | Defence](#).
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Lived experience

Questions

- How will you utilise lived experience voices in this project?
- How will lived experience feature in the goal about using evidence?

Response

Lived experience voice is an identified key source of evidence for the development of the Defence and Veteran Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy. Information gathering and analysis has been undertaken, including of consultation with subject matter experts, members, veterans, families, and community members, in addition to review of existing studies, academic research, government reports, and international benchmarking.

To date, DVA have consulted with the veteran and family community, including those with lived experience, in the following ways:

Veteran Survey – open between 31 July and 28 August, 2023, DVA received input from the 1274 members of the veteran community including 24% female respondents and 74% male respondents.

DVA Staff with lived experience – the DVA Mental and Social Health Policy team facilitated a webinar attended by 37 veteran staff members, including those in identified lived experience roles. The aim of the webinar was to explore the themes from the Veteran Survey and deepen lived experience role in design, through discussion of actions DVA could take to improve the mental health and wellbeing experiences of veterans and their families.

Live Webinars - Defence and DVA jointly hosted live webinars on 5th and 9th October, seeking veteran community input on the themes of the Veteran Survey, priority areas for action, how DVA can ensure supports meet the needs of veterans and their families, and ideas to address barriers to accessing care. 30 community members contributed their insights.

'Involving individuals with lived experience and their families when designing mental health and wellbeing programs, policies and initiatives' was the 3rd ranked priority for respondents to the Veteran Survey. This priority area was reinforced in the Mental Health Expert Roundtable, led by Minister for Veterans and Defence Personnel, the Hon. Matt Keogh, on 7th August 2023.

DVA have commenced work to establish an approach to strengthening lived experience co-design in the next stage of development for the Defence and Veteran Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy. Models and guidelines from across other relevant government portfolios (e.g. the National Suicide Prevention Office, National Mental Health Commission) are being considered, as is input received from DVA Lived Experience Professionals. The approach will prioritise lived experience voice informing the development of Action Plans to support implementation of the Strategy, in addition to lived expertise informing governance, monitoring, evaluation and continuous improvement.

“What about the findings from the Royal Commission?”

Action Plans targeting specific aspects of Defence and veteran mental health will follow release of the Strategy. These action plans will be developed and released after June 2024, in order to allow consideration of the Royal Commission's findings, noting the final report from the Royal Commission is due in June 2024.

“How is DVA working with the Royal Commission?”

DVA has implemented processes to ensure it responds in a timely and transparent manner to all requests from the Royal Commission. DVA is cooperating fully with the Royal Commission to provide all documentation and witnesses needed to inform the inquiry.

The Royal Commission has written to Government, urging the Government to ensure that resourcing and staffing levels are sufficient so that the Commonwealth can respond to the Royal Commission’s requests.

DVA is continuing to support veterans and families during the course of the Royal Commission, and continues to prioritise important work on reducing the claims backlog, and delivering veterans’ mental health and wellbeing programs.
